gameinformer®
THE WORLD'S #1 VIDEO GAM GAZINE

WARCRAFT III: REFORGED

Recrafting A Masterpiece

POWER UP REWARDS

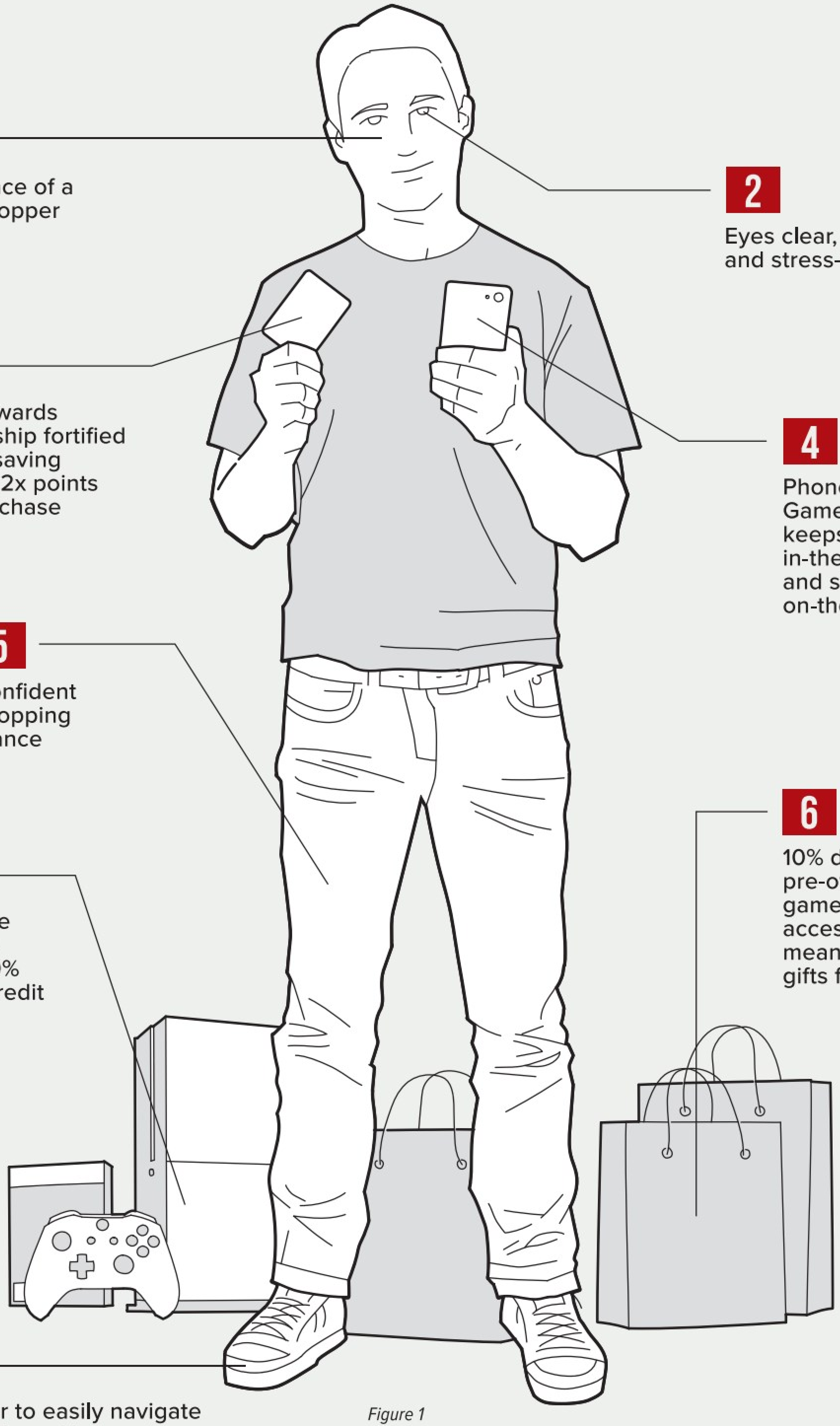
HOLIDAY SHOPPING SURVIVAL TIPS

SHOP LIKE THE PRO YOU ARE

see fig. 1

GAIN THE CONFIDENCE YOU NEED TO WIN THE HOLIDAYS

BECOME A SUCCESSFUL PRO HOLIDAY SHOPPER



1
The happy face of a victorious shopper

2
Eyes clear, alert and stress-free

3
PowerUp Rewards Pro membership fortified with money-saving benefits and 2x points for every purchase

4
Phone w/ GameStop app keeps Pros in-the-know and shopping on-the-go

5
Confident shopping stance

6
10% discount on pre-owned games & accessories means more gifts for less $$

7
Trade-ins give your wallet a boost with 10% extra trade credit

8
Fast footwear to easily navigate around non-PowerUp members

Figure 1

GameStop
POWERUP
REWARDS™

ANDY McNAMARA
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
andy@gameinformer.com
@GI_AndyMc

A Classic Reborn

When I presented our chance to put Warcraft III: Reforged on the cover this month to the team, I joked that the number of times I planned on putting a real-time strategy game on the cover this year – or the next five years – was less than zero. But Warcraft III isn't just a real-time strategy game. I think for many it is considered *the* real-time strategy game. Blizzard's 2002 masterpiece is a seminal game that will make Top 100 games lists for a long time to come.

My sad attempt at humor is based around the fact that games have changed a lot since Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos first came to be, and the era of real-time strategy (RTS) games dominating the sales charts has sadly passed in our modern world dominated by first-person shooters and open worlds.

Similar to the way role-playing games have weaved into our modern games, so too has the blood of those first RTS games. You can find their DNA in hit mobile games like Clash Royale, or in the modern MOBAs like League of Legends – whose very existence is due to a player mod for Warcraft III called Defense of the Ancients. Dota, anyone?

I hope Reforged gives players who never experienced the game a chance to enjoy a true classic, and of those of us who played it back in the day a chance to relive old glories. I personally can't wait to play an updated version of this classic, and you can read all about it in this issue (page 46) and online all month at gameinformer.com.

If any game has a chance to bring RTS back into the mainstream spotlight, it's Warcraft, and maybe, just maybe, if people fall in love with RTS all over again, we can get Warcraft IV someday. A fan can dream, right?

Enjoy the issue.

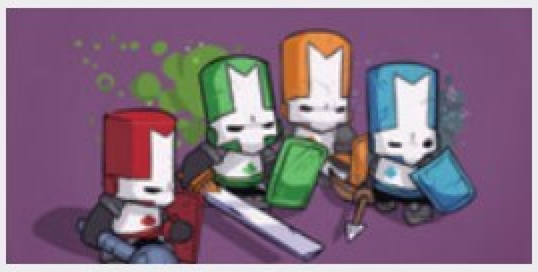
Cheers,

1218

46 Warcraft III: Reforged

Blizzard's massive overhaul of one of the most revered real-time strategy games of all time could put the genre back in the limelight. Discover how this transformation happened and what makes it so special. ***by Daniel Tack***

10 Polish Powerhouse
From classics like Painkiller to modern juggernauts like The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt, Poland has become a hotbed for video game development. We visited the country and spoke with a collection of game makers there about why Poles are so good at making video games.



20 The History Of Flash Games
For a generation of gamers, Flash games were their first introduction to interactive entertainment.

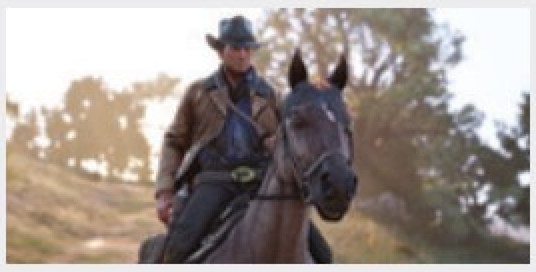
28 The Digital Archeologists
GOG.com sheds light on how surprisingly hard it is to bring classic games to modern PCs.

04 Feedback
18 Impulse: The Blackout Club Takes Teen Horror Co-op
19 Top Ten Gaming Crazes
26 Gamer: Angel Giuffria
27 The Good, The Bad, And The Ugly
44 Afterwords: Spider-Man
30 Interview: Geoff Keighley
45 Timeline
60 Previews
76 Reviews
94 Classic: WarioWare
96 Game Over: War Of Triviacraft

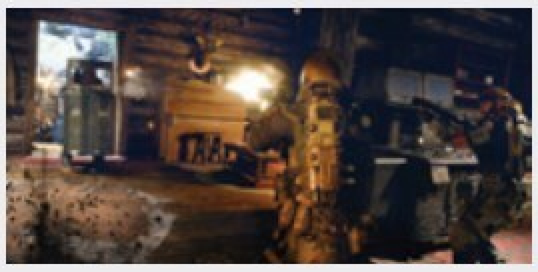
32 Holiday Buying Guide 2018
It’s the time of year when the people you love demand you prove it with presents. Thankfully, you can make the same request of them. To help with that process, we’ve put together a collection of assorted nerdy baubles that you can purchase yourself, or ask that they be purchased for you.

60 Control
The latest from the creators of Max Payne and Quantum Break sets up an intriguing mystery.

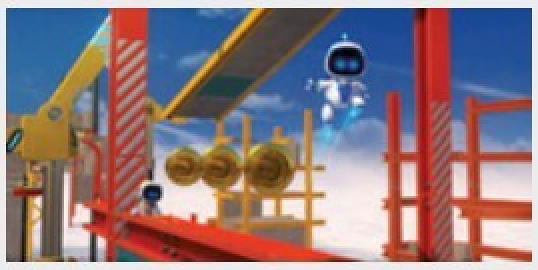
68 Diablo Immortal
Diablo is exploring a whole new platform: mobile devices.



78 Red Dead Redemption II
It’s been eight years since Rockstar released Red Dead Redemption. Is the sequel worth the wait?



80 Call Of Duty: Black Ops 4
As long as you don’t mind the lack of a single-player campaign, you’re in for a fantastic entry.



90 Astro Bot Rescue Mission
Seemingly out of nowhere, Sony delivered a VR platformer that would even impress Mario.

games index

Assassin’s Creed Odyssey 81
Astro Bot Rescue Mission 90
Battlefield V. 64
Blackout Club, The 18
Call of Duty: Black Ops 4. 80
Control 60
Dead or Alive 6 71
Diablo Immortal. 68
Fallout 76 62
Fist of the North Star: Lost Paradise 92
Forza Horizon 4 82
Hearthstone: Rastakhan’s Rumble 67
Jackbox Party Pack 5, The 89
Labyrinth of Refrain: Coven of Dusk. 92
Lego DC Super-Villains 84
Life is Strange 2: Episode 1 – Roads 86
Magic: The Gathering Arena . . . 72
Missing: J.J. Macfield and the Island of Memories, The . . 87
Ninjala. 74
Nelke & the Legendary Alchemists: Ateliers of the New World. 75
Overwatch. 66
Pathologic 2 73
Red Dead Redemption II 78
Resident Evil 2. 65
Return of the Obra Dinn. 88
Shadow of the Tomb Raider. . . . 69
Soulcalibur VI 83
Spider-Man 44
Starlink: Battle for Atlas 85
Super Mario Party 91
Timespinner. 92
Underworld Ascendant 70
Wandersong 92
Warcraft III: Reforged 46
WarioWare. 94
World Ends With You: Final Remix, The 92

Readers revolt against the most prevalent trend in gaming this month – surprise! Spider-Man, Xena: Warrior Princess, and hurricanes were also popular topics. It was a weird one, all right.

A Royale Pain?

Not to hate on the genre or disrespect the developers who've worked hard on their games, but the battle-royale genre isn't really original or cool to me anymore. The first time I saw Fortnite, I was like, "Hey, cool concept." Now when I look at Call of Duty: Black Ops 4's Blackout mode, I'm like, "Is this necessary?" I don't really know if battle-royale has changed for better or for worse.

Elijah Alexander
via email

I just want to say I am sick and tired of hearing about battle royales. It's getting to the point where it feels like the lootbox controversy a few months ago. Whenever I saw something about lootboxes, I just gave an aggravated sigh and thought, "They're *still* talking about lootboxes?" Battle-royale games have reached the same level of annoyance, in my opinion.

Noah Lee
via email

The continued popularity of battle-royale modes has started grating on some gamers, and it's only going to get worse as more developers chase the trend. On the bright side, while you might not enjoy reading about them, battle-royale modes are still a ton of fun to play! Case in point: Black Ops 4's Blackout mode, which you can read about in our review on page 80. Or not. Your choice.

Xena Phobia?

One of the biggest questions is why didn't Santa Monica ever use Xena: Warrior Princess in the God of War series? Xena and Kratos are so similar it is downright scary. Both have killed gods. Both have skills (but Xena is more skilled). It would have made for some epic moments in the series – I would love to see Kratos vs. Xena. Sadly, this will never happen now, as Santa Monica is rumored to be moving onto Mayan and Egyptian themes in future games. So maybe Kratos vs. The Scorpion King?

David Johnson
via email

The fact that Santa Monica didn't go out of its way to negotiate a licensing deal for Universal's cheesy champion isn't that big of a surprise – the character's tongue-in-cheek persona wouldn't have fit with this year's thoughtful reimagining of the franchise, and given the tone of the original trilogy, an old-school Xena/Kratos showdown would've probably been a lot more…carnal than what you were hoping for. Either way, it's probably best their paths never crossed.

Contact Us

Send your questions, comments, and rants to feedback@gameinformer.com for a chance to be featured in the magazine!

Kid Tested, G.I. Approved

Hello, I'm a 12-year-old kid just like a few of the other "almost-teens" that appeared in recent issues, and I too am frustrated by the games I can and can't play. I'm at a point in life where I think I'm mature enough to make my own choices about the games I play, but my parents are blocking me. Specifically, I think I'm old enough for games like Lego City Undercover. On the other hand, I'm not sure if I'm ready for the games like GTA, Doom, and, of course, Dark Souls. Please help.

Peter Palacio
via email

Normally, we would poke fun at youngsters complaining about the games they can't play, but you may have a reasonable case. Lego City's E10+ rating puts it in your age group, so unless your parents have a strong aversion to cartoony violence, it may be an appropriate choice. We suggest sitting down with them and taking a look at the ESRB's web listing for Lego City Undercover, and watching a little online gameplay so they can get an idea of what it entails. Discussing it with them – and respecting their final choice – is a great way to prove your maturity. Not GTA-level maturity, mind you, but *maybe* Lego City maturity…

Seething Over Spidey

Why did you not give Spider-Man a 10?! It totally deserves it. Sure, there may be glitches or aspects that aren't as interesting, but Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild and Overwatch weren't perfect, either! I know half a point doesn't seem like that big of a deal, but it is when a 10 is considered so rare. You gave Overwatch a 10 and the Game of the Month award, so why not Spider-Man?

Isaiah Alexander
via email

The reason 10s are rare is precisely because we don't give them out often. Spider-Man is an amazing game, but for our reviewer, it just didn't climb all the way to the top. No one should hand out a 10 if they don't personally think the game is worthy, right? However, don't let our assessment stop you from enjoying what is still an exceptional adventure (which did handily win our Game of the Month award, for the record). Speaking of not enjoying Spider-Man…

Still Waiting…

I gotta admit, the new Spider-Man has me feeling salty about being an Xbox One owner. Insomniac has provided the PS4 with yet another incredible console seller and I'm still waiting on Microsoft to do the same (Cuphead is dope, but Halo is past its prime). I don't mind that the PS4 has great first-party titles, but for Microsoft to let this one slip through their fingertips is a major loss. I have never wanted to buy a console because of one game before, but if I did get a PS4, I'd be in a first-party vortex with God of War, Horizon Zero Dawn, Uncharted, etc. My only hope is, seeing that Insomniac has worked with Xbox before (Sunset Overdrive), they could somehow pull a Tomb Raider and bring Spider-Man to the Xbox One in the future. I know I'm not the only Xbox One owner feeling this way.

Eryk Christian
Minneapolis, MN

Not to be the crusher of dreams or anything, but Spider-Man won't be swinging to Xbox anytime soon – not only is Sony the publisher of the game, but Insomniac has stated its game will "never" come to Xbox or PC. That said, Marvel is working with other publishers and developers on more comic-inspired games, so Xbox One may land some superheroes of its own in the future.

G.I., Unplugged

My husband, two kids (11 and 13 years old), and I have had no power for a week and a half because of Hurricane Florence. We did get the mail on the fourth day – including the new *Game Informer*. The mailbox had water in it (like everything else), so we had to wait for it to dry, but a few days later we got to read it on paper that was ruffled and looking… Fallout-ish. It made the Fallout 76 preview all the better! Thanks for the great article and info.

Summer Cox
North Caroline Coast, NC

We're glad we could help pass the time, Summer! We hope this issue's Fallout 76 hands-on impressions (on page 62) provide your family with an easier read – though you could always drop it in the tub first if you miss the post-apocalyptic feel. Stay safe and dry!

Short Answers To Readers' Burning Questions:

"Wouldn't Ubisoft have more to work with if Assassin's Creed Odyssey was its own IP?"

Yes, but if there's one thing Odyssey doesn't need, it's "more."

"Do you guys feel there's a Soul Reaver remaster coming?"

On a long enough timeline, the remaster rate for every game rises to 100.

"Why don't you put the game of the month on the cover of the magazine?"

Then what would we call the cover story?

Best Feedback Typos Of The Month:

"Ubersoft should make more third-person military shooters like Ghost Recon Wetlands."

Question Of The Month:

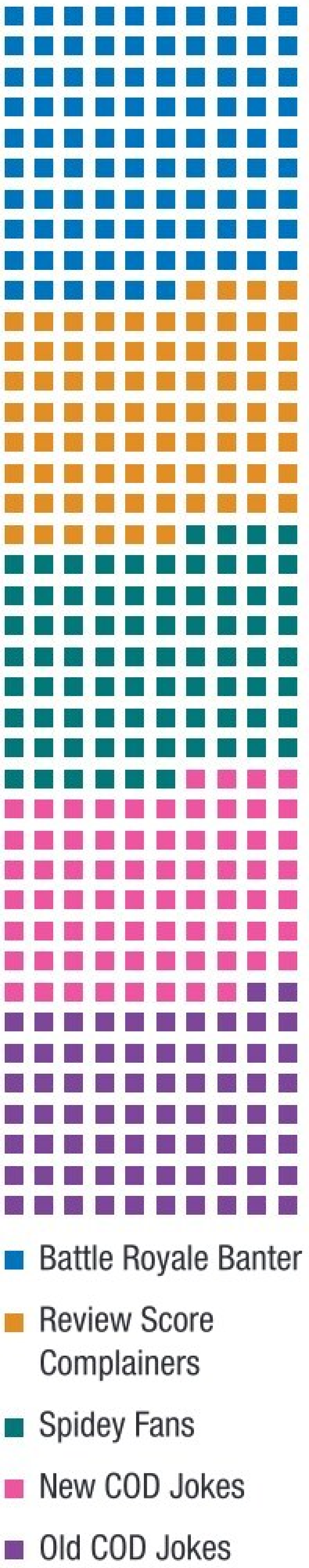
It's time, folks: What is your favorite game from 2018, and why?

gi spy

PHOTOS FROM THE VIDEO GAME INDUSTRY

(Left) This month we visited Blizzard to learn all about Warcraft III: Reforged from project leads/fledgling gang, Pete Stilwell, Matt Morris, and Dave Berggren. **(Right)** We also spoke with the original producer on Warcraft III, Chris Sigaty, who yelled "Job's done!" at the end of the interview, for some reason.

On Your Mind



Continuing Call Of Duty

In issue 306, we asked players what bright ideas they'd bring to Call of Duty if they were in charge of the series. After weeding out all the "DUR, I'd kill it!" jokes, a few readers posited some intriguing ideas.

I'd like to see less scripted action and more simulation in the campaign (I don't care about multiplayer). Put mission planning into the hands of the player instead of just chasing a bot around with "Follow" over his head, and have your decisions and performance change the storyline as it progresses.

Jerry Mathieu

I actually like that Call of Duty is doing battle royale, but I hope they try new modes and ideas with the format. Experiment with massive teams, or large-scale co-op against zombies, or crazy weapons. Basically, keep adding new twists every week so players have more reasons to keep coming back.

Adam Johansson

I want to see COD put in a feature that bans any COD haters from playing the game ever again. "Sorry you can't play our game because you talk too much trash."

Jeremy Amacher

(Left) Like we'd go to Blizzard and not ask about Diablo! Thankfully, Wyatt Cheng, Joseph Hsu, and Caleb Arseneaux had the answers we were seeking. **(Right)** Back at G.I., 505 Games' Alex Munson (left) and OtherSide Entertainment's Joe Fielder (second to right) braved the Minnesota weather to show us Underworld Ascendant.

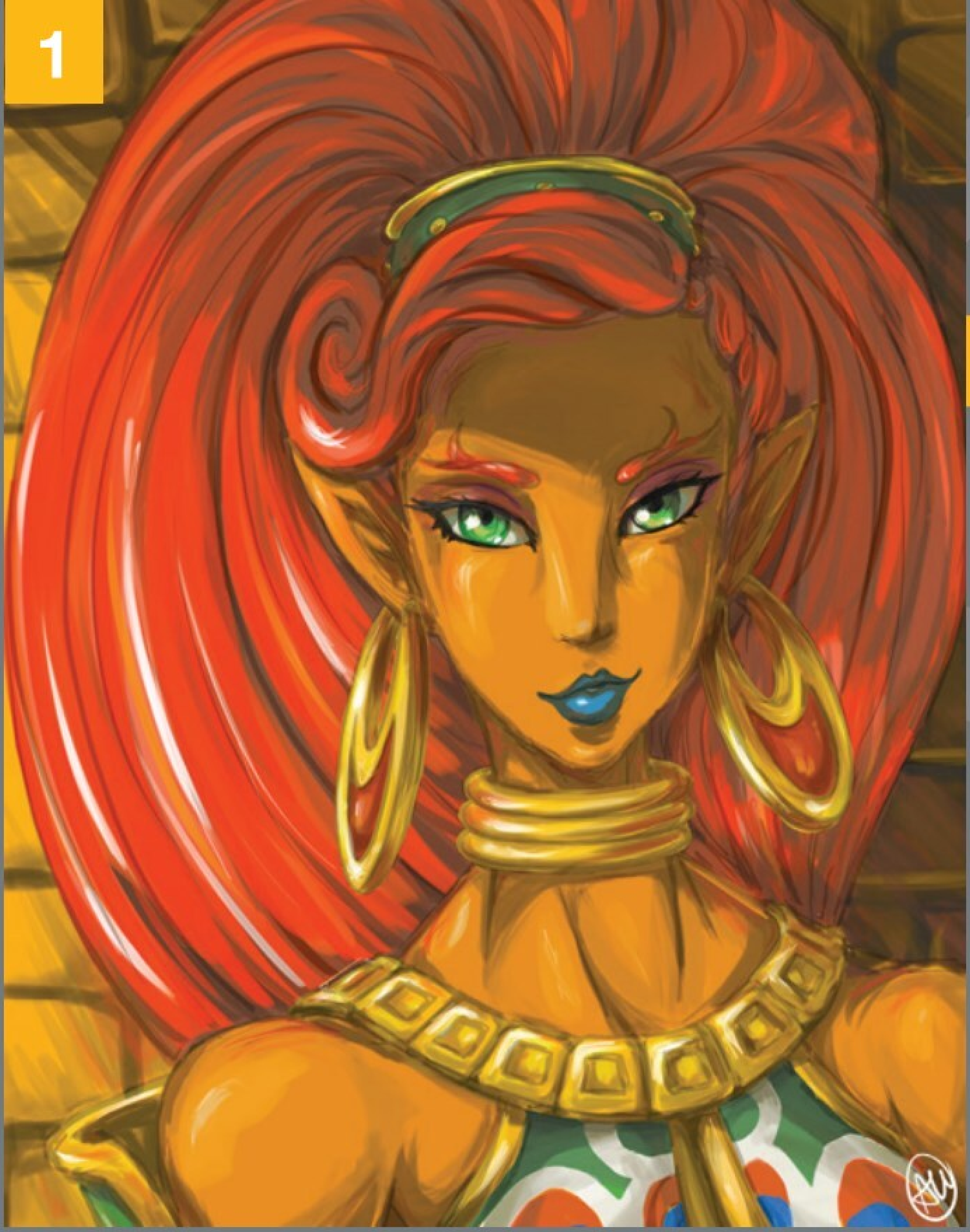
(continued on page 8)

GEICO®

COMBINE
HOME & AUTO
insurance and you could save.

geico.com | 1-800-947-AUTO | Local Office

Some discounts, coverages, payment plans and features are not available in all states, in all GEICO companies, or in all situations. Boat and PWC coverages are underwritten by GEICO Marine Insurance Company. Homeowners, renters and condo coverages are written through non-affiliated insurance companies and are secured through the GEICO Insurance Agency, Inc. Motorcycle and ATV coverages are underwritten by GEICO Indemnity Company. GEICO is a registered service mark of Government Employees Insurance Company, Washington, DC 20076; a Berkshire Hathaway Inc. subsidiary. © 2018 GEICO



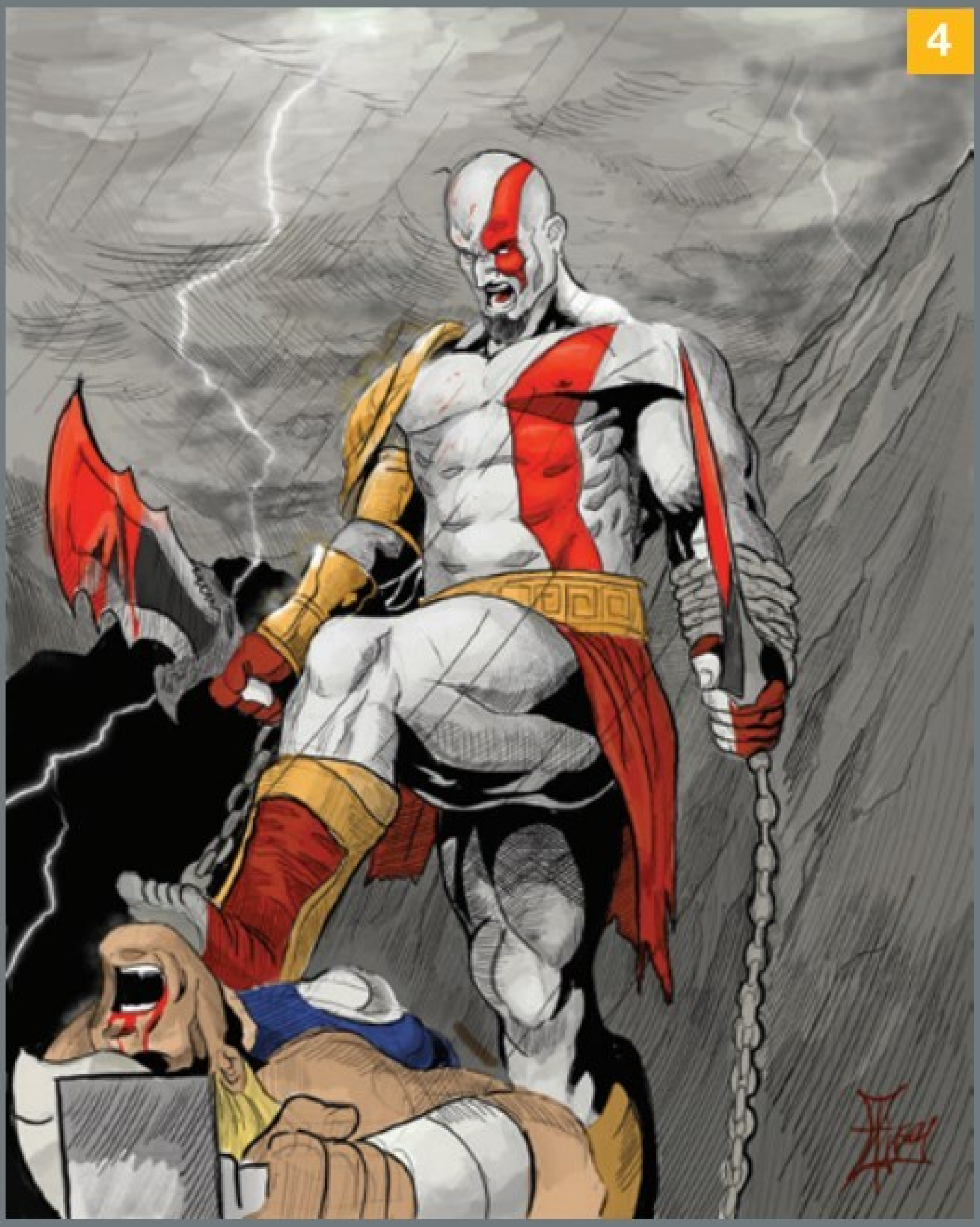
WINNER

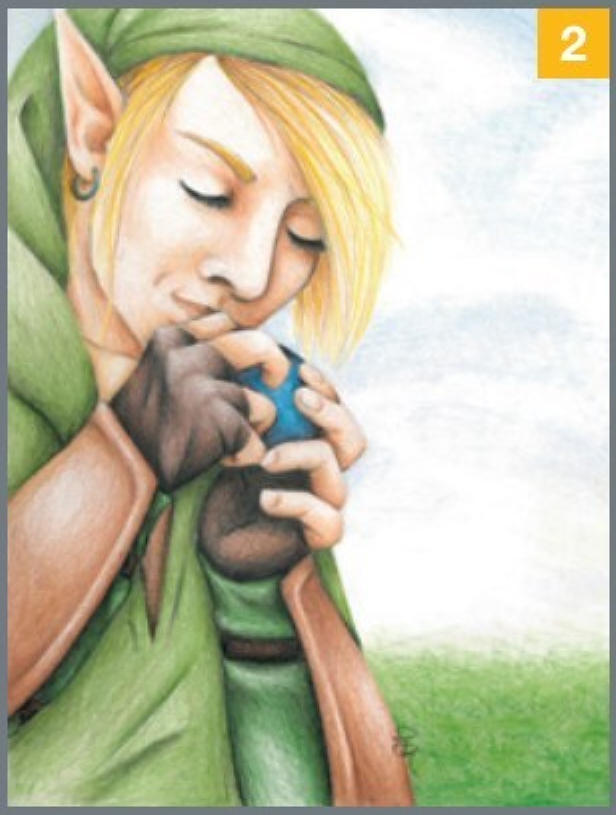
1 Ally Wainwright
The only thing missing from this picture of Urbosa is her glorious abs.

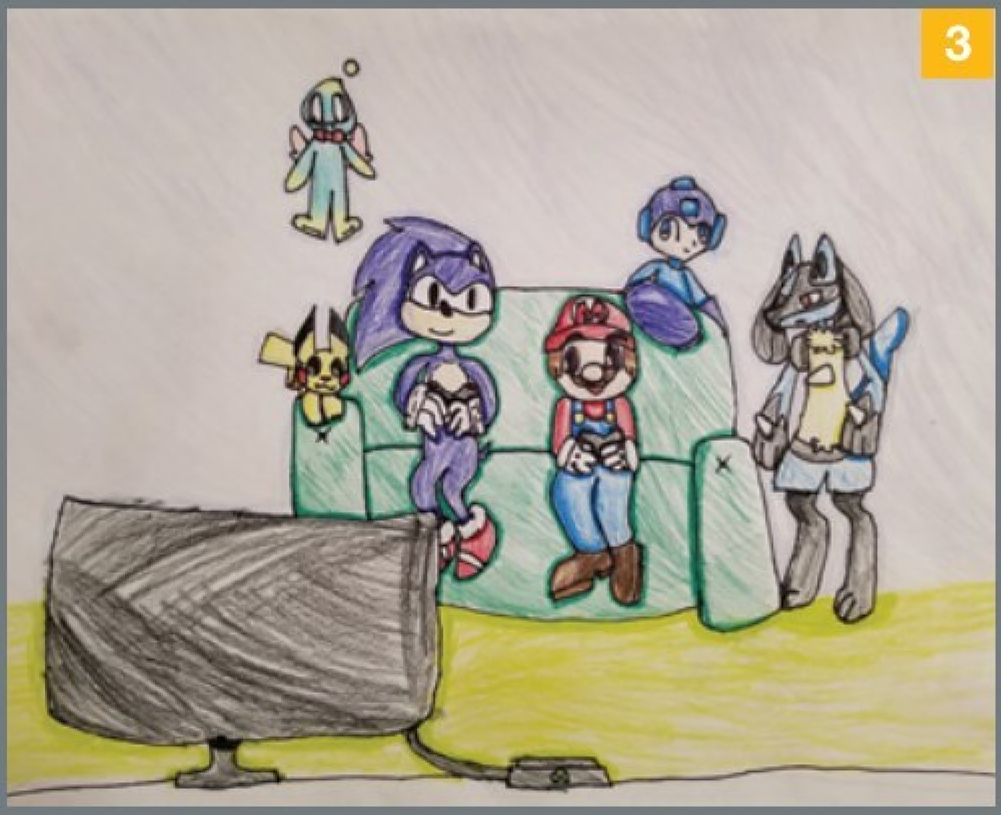
2 Jessica Butler
Is Link playing the ocarina, or trying to peel an Easter egg? You be the judge…

3 Maddison Rain Bowe
Kinda ironic that all of Sega and Nintendo's mascots would sit around and play an Xbox, right?

4 Casey Pollard
We love Kratos and all, but he's really screwing up the Marvel Cinematic Universe now.







» Submit your art for a chance to win our monthly prize «
Please include your name, email address, and return address. Entries become the property of Game Informer and cannot be returned.
Send to: Game Informer Reader Art Contest, 724 First Street North, 3rd Floor, Minneapolis, MN 55401 | Email to: ReaderArt@gameinformer.com

(continued from page 6)

CONTROL
REMEDY
505 GAMES

(Left) During a recent event, Bertz handily defeated Timberwolves all-star Karl-Anthony Towns in a match of NBA 2K Playgrounds 2. In a real-life hoops showdown? We're guessing not so much. **(Right)** We recently got some face time with Control voice actress Courtney Hope and writer/director Sam Lake.

FLIP THE RAINBOW
Skittles
TASTE THE RAINBOW®

©2017 Wm. Wrigley Jr. Company. SKITTLES and all affiliated designs are trademarks of Wm. Wrigley Jr. Company or its affiliates.

Polish Powerhouse

How a small Eastern European nation became one of the hottest regions for video game development

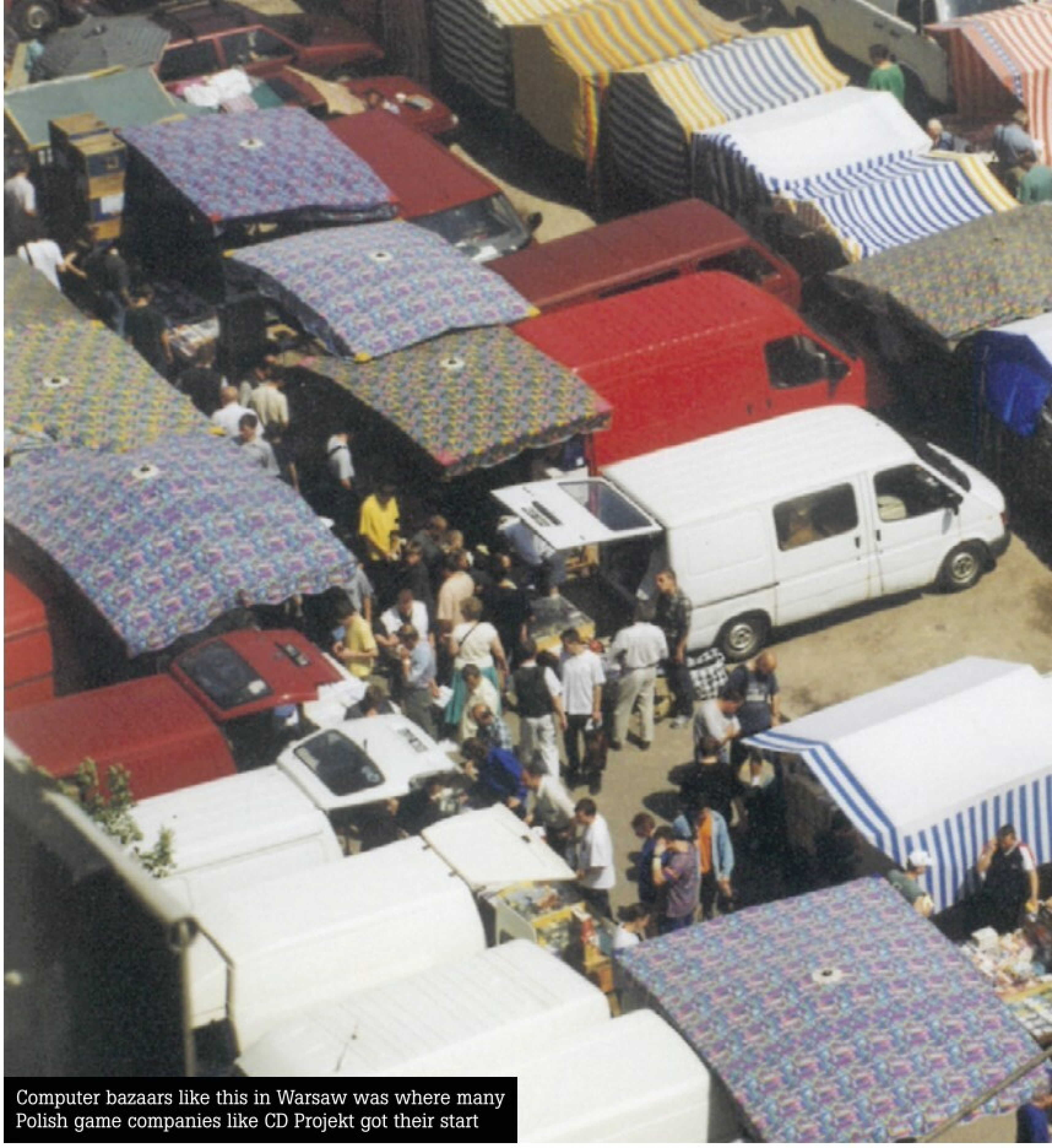
by Matt Bertz

W

When its founders were peddling pirated games on the streets of Warsaw in the early '90s, no one knew the name CD Projekt. Fast forward three decades, and the developer is the darling of the gaming industry. The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt's vibrant open world, compelling characters, and short-story quality side quests earned it universal accolades. *Game Informer* readers recently voted it the best game of all time, and its popularity compelled Netflix to commission a series based on the franchise. Since release, the studio has built a loyal fan base thanks to a steady stream of free downloadable content, several high-quality paid expansions, and a fierce stance against nickel-and-diming microtransactions. All eyes are now on its next game, Cyberpunk 2077, to see how – not if – CD Projekt can raise the bar for open-world RPGs once again.

The world may be focused intensely on CD Projekt, but if you widen the angle slightly to take in the entirety of the Polish development scene, what you find may astound you.

Over the last 20 years, Poland has become a hotbed of game development talent, delivering memorable titles like This War of Mine, Dying Light, and Bulletstorm. To understand how this small country once trapped behind the Iron Curtain has become an epicenter for interactive entertainment, I traveled to Poland to speak with the people who put the country on the map.



Computer bazaars like this in Warsaw was where many Polish game companies like CD Projekt got their start

GAMING BEHIND THE IRON CURTAIN

Standing in the middle of Warsaw's city center, if you blink quickly you could easily mistake the Polish capital for an American city. Unlike the picturesque vision many have in their heads of European hubs, the city isn't just a serpentine tangle of one-lane cobblestone streets, historical landmarks, and open-air cafes. While you can certainly find neighborhood pockets that feed that stereotype, this part of the city is surprisingly modern. Wide streets with multiple lanes cut a swath through the neighborhood. Netflix advertisements for its latest original series adorn the sides of high-rises, and Uber Eats deliverymen zoom down the streets bringing lunch to the hundreds of multinational corporations that call the area home.

The modern aesthetic shouldn't be surprising given Poland's impressive upward trajectory. Since it joined the European Union in 2004, its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has surged remarkably year over year, making it the second largest economy among Central and Eastern European Countries (CEEC), behind Germany. Polish game companies have played a big role in this economic growth. Nearly 300 game studios call the country home. Shares of the larger game companies like CD Projekt and 11 bit Studios are even traded on the Warsaw Stock Exchange. But eras of peace and prosperity like this have been few and far between in the country's history.

Throughout the last several centuries, regional powers have run roughshod over the Polish territory. With few geographical buffers to protect it, Poland's flat plains and ample farmland made it ripe for conquer, and neighboring countries took advantage. Throughout history, the territory suffered invasions at the hands of the Austrians, French, Germans, Russians, Swedish, and even the Mongols. The occupying Nazis razed Warsaw during World War II, and from the end of the war until its transformation into a democratic republic in the 1990, Poland's government operated under the oppressive thumb of the Soviet Union.

Video games rose to prominence across the globe while Poland was locked behind the Iron Curtain, but despite the closed markets of the Soviet era, games still found their way into the country. Many Poles were first introduced to games in the same way Americans were – through arcades. The first arcade opened in Warsaw in 1972, boasting an original Pong machine. During the same time, mobile wooden shacks housing several arcade units were wheeled around from town to town, giving the wider regions of Poland their first exposure to pinball machines and Western games.

Playing video games within the confines of your private home, however, was much harder. With a struggling economy, many store shelves were empty. People had to wait in line for basic amenities like food and toilet paper, so it was understandable that consoles like the Nintendo Entertainment System or Sega Genesis never made a cultural dent. If you wanted to play the latest and greatest games, your best bet was the black market, where the PC gaming scene took root.

"ZX Spectrum was the first big gaming thing," says CD Projekt co-founder Marcin Iwiński. "It had a lot of advantages. First and foremost, it was affordable. What was really crucial here is you could load the games using a cassette player – any cassette player – so you didn't need to buy one. Then you could copy the games from friends and cassette tapes. It sounds totally insane as of today, but they were actually broadcasting computer programs over the radio. They would say like, 'Right now you'll be able to render some functions with some beautiful graphics so tune in.' We would record it and then play it back and load it onto our Spectrums."

A loose-knit gaming community organically formed around the weekly outdoor markets in cities like Warsaw and Wroclaw, where likeminded Poles got together to buy and sell computers, talk about new games, and swap pirated PC software.

"In Poland we were like China – we didn't have copy protection before 1994," says Techland founder Paweł Marchewka. "You could buy a legal version of Microsoft Windows in a shop and it had nothing to do with Microsoft. Microsoft wasn't selling it."

These gaming havens became the breeding ground for the future leaders

The Land Nintendo Never Conquered

Most of the world fell in love with Nintendo in the '80s and '90s, but Mario, Zelda, and company never really breached Poland's borders. During the heyday of the NES and SNES, Poland was struggling to wrestle its own sovereignty away from the Soviet Union. Like many suffering countries behind the Iron Curtain at that time, luxuries like home consoles weren't available.

"Poland did not have the entire Nintendo phase," says The Astronauts founder Adrian Chmielarz, who grew up during this era. "We didn't have Game Boy or anything like that in Poland."

The only way Poles could play popular Nintendo games like Super Mario Bros. and Contra was via a knock-off console called the Pegasus. The games were buried on bootleg multi-carts that housed a dozen or so titles each.

The majority of Poles instead flocked to PC gaming, where pirated copies of games were readily available.

PEGASUS
FAMILY VIDEO GAME

CD Projekt founders Marcin Iwiński (left) and Michał Kiciński (right) attending Gambleriada '97 video game expo in Warsaw

ACE VENTURA

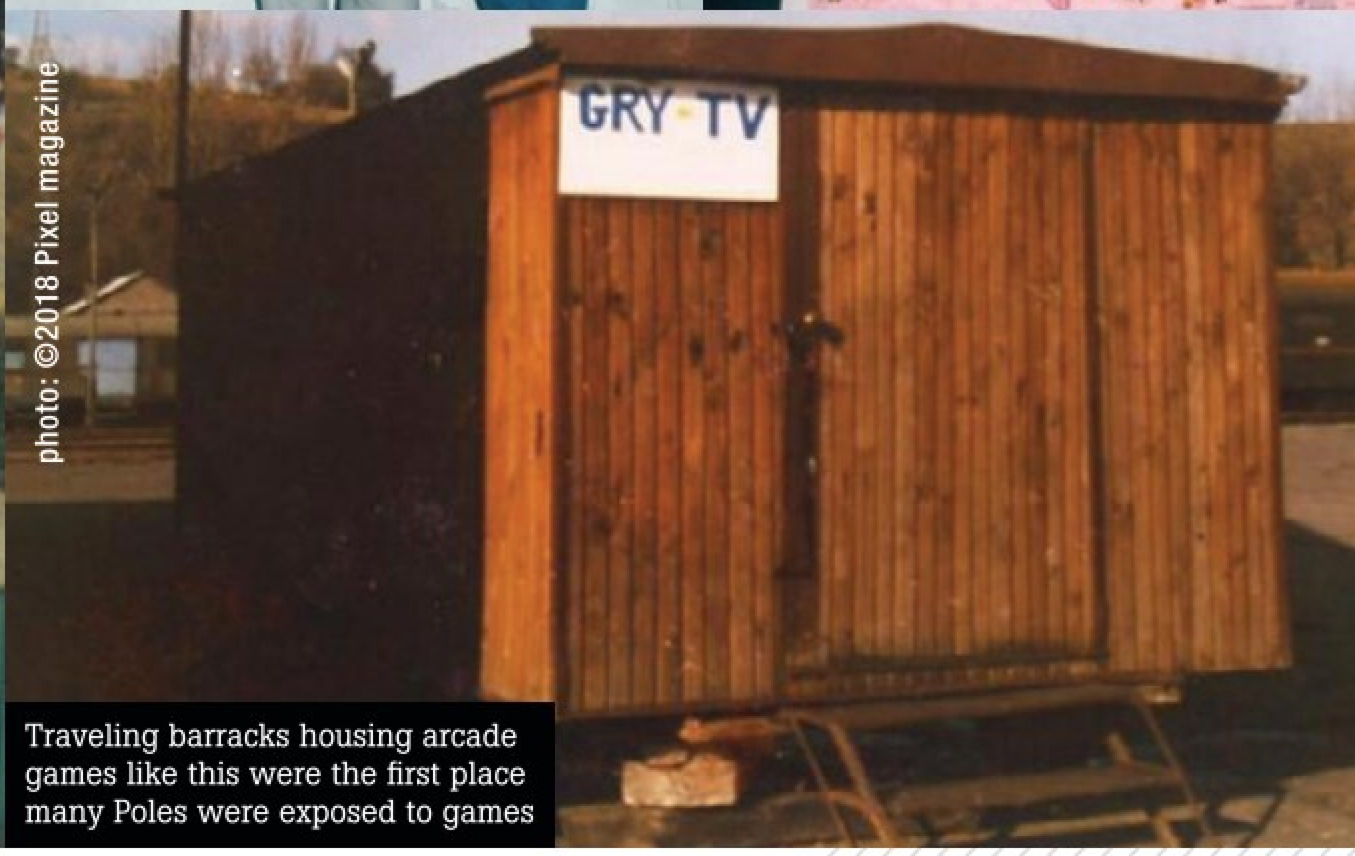


photo: ©2018 Pixel magazine

Traveling barracks housing arcade games like this were the first place many Poles were exposed to games

of the Polish game-development scene. Founders of studios like CD Projekt, Techland, and People Can Fly cut their teeth sourcing and distributing new software from America and Europe, so they were poised to act when the economy transitioned to an open market and copyright laws fell into place.

"I was on the bulletin-board system scene, so I had a lot of contacts in the West," Iwiński recalls. "I was probably one of the first in Poland who bought a CD-ROM reader. They were crazy expensive at that time, and I bought a few games – The 7th Guest, Mad Dog McCree, Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis, or Day of the Tentacle to name the top hits back then. Then Michał Kiciński – a friend from high school and a future [CD Projekt] co-founder – he came over to my place and said, 'Wow, maybe we could sell some.' I started importing from a small U.S. wholesaler over the week, and then he was selling over the weekend."

Suddenly, games were everywhere and the market was booming, but there was one catch – none of the games were localized for the Polish market. The majority of Polish gamers played the games in English. CD Projekt raised the issue with publishers, but no one thought they'd make back enough money to justify the cost. That's when CD Projekt decided to take it upon themselves to do it. Their first localized games, Ace Ventura and Pink Panther, did well enough in Iwiński's eyes to attempt a much bolder localization for BioWare's ambitious RPG Baldur's Gate. The game's publisher, Interplay, did not want to take any risk nor workload related to the Polish version, but acquiesced when CD Projekt agreed to contractually take all the responsibility and eat the costs if it failed miserably.

CD Projekt hired 10 translators and more than 20 Polish voice actors for the thousands of pages of dialogue, and even recorded ambient chatter for the market so the background shouting was in Polish. They also made an expensive-looking hardcover manual that looked like a D&D player's handbook, complete with a map printed on parchment paper.

"On the day of release, we shipped 18,000 units and nobody could believe that," Iwiński says. "We had a queue of wholesalers, and we actually had to take an external warehouse because in our small office could fit maybe just 5,000. They were fighting in front of the warehouse for who will get the stock first. In the first two years we sold over 50,000. Nobody – including Interplay – could believe it."

The massive success of Baldur's Gate not only proved localized games were viable in Poland, but that the locals were willing to cough up money for it despite years of paying next to nothing for pirated games.

CD Projekt employees unloading day-one boxes of the Polish version of Baldur's Gate

DIY GAME DEVELOPMENT

Emboldened by the business experience gained in distribution, many of the early Polish companies turned their focus toward an ambitious new goal – making their own games.

"I remember standing in a queue for Theme Park in '94 or '95 and I thought, 'My god, we are in a queue as wholesalers buying Theme Park for what would now be the equivalent of 40 euro, while we were making a fraction of Western salaries,'" Marchewka says. "I thought it's not okay, we should be doing the opposite. Here in Poland we should be making games and selling them to the Western countries." Marchewka started putting flyers out on the exchange market recruiting programmers, artists, and designers to Techland.

After years tinkering with computers in their basements and bedrooms, much of the first generation of Polish game developers were completely self-taught, learning on the fly. That was the case for Adrian Chmielarz and Grzegorz Miechowski, who funded their first game by selling computers. As Metropolis Software, they released their first commercial product, Tajemnica Statuetki (The Mystery of the Statuette), in 1993. The point-and-click adventure used photographs from Chmielarz's vacation on Saint-Tropez to tell the story of a detective trying to recover stolen artifacts. The game was a hit in Poland, but distributors didn't purchase many copies so they were left to handle the majority of shipments themselves.

"I spent a year going every single week to the post office and mailing every single copy myself, writing the addresses and everything," Chmielarz remembers. The duo went on to make Teenagent and Gorky 17 (released as Odium in North America), two other Polish cult favorites.

But as successful as these games were in the country, none of the titles put Poland development on the map internationally.

People Can Fly's Painkiller (2004) was the first Polish game to garner international acclaim

After years of making games, Techland's big break came with Call of Jaurez (2005), which Ubisoft published in North America

POLAND'S BIG BREAK

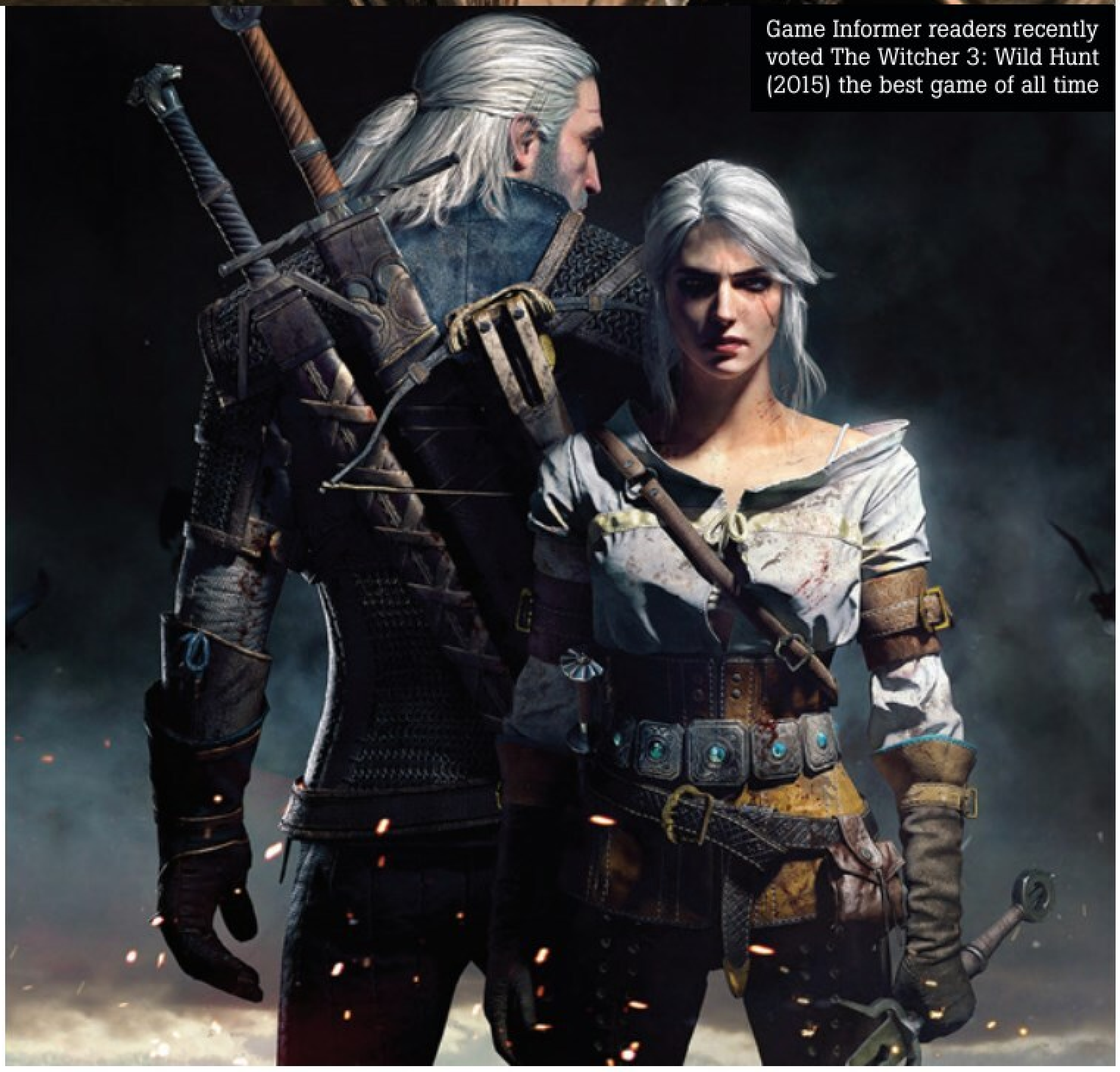
Understandably focused on the preexisting talent pools in North America and Europe, the majority of game publishers in the '90s and early 2000s didn't have Polish game developers on their radar. The more persistent studios were able to secure meetings, but these didn't always go as they envisioned.

"It was very hard, especially at the beginning," Marchewka says. "Back then, the publishers really didn't need to buy anything. There were people from acquisition going around looking at games, always bored…They come up with a lot of different reasons not to buy."

"We were hearing straight nos for three years in a row," Iwiński adds. "We couldn't go out into the market with Witcher without the publishing partners because how would we get it into the stores? There's no way."

The big break for many Polish developers came in the same calendar year: 2004. The first company to make real headway globally was People Can Fly, a studio Chmielarz started after leaving Metropolis. His first project with the new studio was Painkiller, a moody, bloody first-person shooter that took cues from predecessors like Doom and Quake. Impressed by the proprietary engine and fast-paced action, Canadian publisher DreamCatcher Interactive took a chance on the studio. Released in April of that year, Painkiller was well received by critics, earning an 8.5 from *Game Informer* and spawning several expansion packs and follow-ups.

That same year, at E3 Techland



Game Informer readers recently voted The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt (2015) the best game of all time

showed off a Western-themed first-person shooter named Lawman (which was later rebranded Call of Juarez). The game caught the eye of Ubisoft, who eventually agreed to publish it in North America. The Western did well enough for Ubisoft to franchise the brand, establishing Techland's reputation as a capable studio.

CD Projekt debuted its first game at the same E3. Unable to gain traction with any publishers, the studio was given a big visibility boost by fellow RPG developers BioWare. Having established a relationship with the Canadian studio during the Baldur's Gate localization, CD Projekt licensed the Aurora engine for The Witcher. A few months before E3, Iwiński got an unexpected invitation from studio founders Ray Muzyka and Greg Zeschuk to show their prototype at the BioWare booth. The game caught notice from the press and publishers, and a few years later they signed a publishing deal with Atari.

The Polish Game Hall Of Fame

Poland has delivered dozens of memorable video games worth playing, but these are the best of the best.

XBOX 360
BULLETSTORM

« Bulletstorm

Platform: PS4, Xbox One, PS3, 360, PC

Developer: People Can Fly

Release: 2011

Dying Light »

Platform: PS4, Xbox One, PC

Developer: Techland

Release: 2015

DYING LIGHT
GOOD NIGHT GOOD LUCK
TECHLAND

PC CD-ROM
PAINKILLER
16

« Painkiller

Platform: Xbox, PC

Developer: People Can Fly

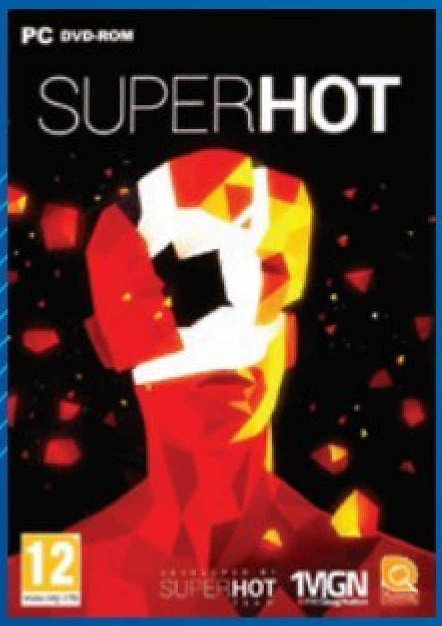
Release: 2004

Superhot »

Platform: PS4, Xbox One, PC

Developer: Superhot Team

Release: 2016



PS4
THE WITCHER
WILD HUNT

« The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt

Platform: PS4, Xbox One, PC

Developer: CD Projekt Red

Release: 2015

This War of Mine »

Platform: PS4, Xbox One, Switch, PC, iOS, Android

Developer: 11 bit Studios

Release: 2014

THIS WAR OF MINE

Epic Games acquired People Can Fly and released Bulletstorm (2011) in partnership with EA. Before regaining its independence, the developer also helped on the early iterations of Fortnite

A TALENT EXPLOSION

In the wake of the success experienced by early trailblazers like People Can Fly, Techland, and CD Projekt, new Polish developers spawned at a rapid rate. Many talented designers left these studios to form their own companies, and over the next decade it was no longer uncommon to see a Polish game earn international praise. Dead Island. Anomaly: Warzone Earth. Bulletstorm. Dying Light. Layers of Fear. The Vanishing of Ethan Carter. This War of Mine. Superhot. Observer. The parade of quality interactive experiences is remarkable. Which raises the question – what is it about Poland that made it such a prolific breeding ground for development talent? Many of the developers we spoke to pointed to an innate creativity and ambition born out of idolizing American culture while suffering under the oppressive communist regime.

"The creativity aspect was there because we didn't have 10 different toys to play with as a kid," Marchweka says. "You had to take a branch from a tree and then imagine you had a bazooka, for example. We were used to being creative, so I think this aspect stays in mind. Plus, I think Western countries have been reasonably wealthy for a long time in comparison, so we are much more hungry for success. When we were young, we would watch movies from Western countries thinking, 'Oh my god, look at the cars they have.' Almost anything they had, we didn't have…People had American dreams here, too. We didn't have Polish dreams."

Ambition certainly helps, as does having a gift for technology. Poland's always had a knack for math and science – after all, famous Renaissance mathematician and astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus hailed from the region – but over the past several decades the country has solidified a reputation for being tech savvy. The rich education base helps. Poland currently places fourth in Europe – behind only France, Germany, and the United Kingdom – in the number of students enrolled in higher education. Many of these students are studying engineering and computer science, making the country a hotbed for tech start-ups. This naturally aligns with many of the same skills needed to develop video games.

When Poland joined the European

Union in 2004, it declined to adopt the euro currency, instead preserving the Polish Zloty. This crucial decision unknowingly had a buttressing effect on the game development scene. When international hits like The Witcher and Dying Light sell for full price in the United States and Europe, that money goes much further in Poland than it would if the studios were based in San Francisco, Paris, or another Western city.

"We're growing stronger because we are earning Western money but living in Poland," Chmielarz says. "The studios are sort of twice as strong when they hit jackpot with a game, right? This allows them to invest even more. Even in order to sort of survive they don't need as much even so as Western companies."

The games designed in Poland cover a wide swath of genres, so there is no quintessentially "Polish" quality you can identify across the board, but in recent years more of the nation's national identity has started to emerge through specific games.

"I think around The Witcher and when [11 bit Studios] were making This War of Mine that we understood we have something to say – we have our own identity," says 11 bit Studios art director Przemysław Marszał. "For the Witcher you could see that they were showing some Eastern European [folklore]. On the other side with This War of Mine, we also translated a lot of our history and experience with the times like the war into the game. We look at things differently as every nation does, and I think we thought about it and said, 'Let's say something that has some part of Polish culture and history in games.'"

These success stories have led to an immense amount of national pride in the game development scene. The Polish government established grant programs to advance and grow the games industry in the region, and Polish prime minister Donald Tusk presented a collector's edition of The Witcher 2: Assassins of Kings as a gift to U.S. President Barack Obama during a diplomatic visit in 2011. When he revisited Poland in 2015, Obama mentioned the game in his opening remarks.

"The last time I was here, Donald [Tusk] gave me a gift, the video game developed here in Poland that's won fans the world over, The Witcher," he said. "I confess, I'm not very good at video games, but I've been told that it is a great example of Poland's place in the new global economy. And it's a tribute to the talents and work ethic of the Polish people as well as the wise stewardship of Polish leaders like prime minister Tusk."

"We were like, 'Holy f---, that's pretty decent PR,'" Iwiński says.

POLE POSITION

It's not hard to see a future where the Polish development community continues to grow in prominence. Techland and 11 bit Studios recently expanded to add game publishing divisions. CD Projekt owns and operates the digital distribution platform GOG.com, a DRM-free Steam competitor that just celebrated its 10th anniversary (read more about it on page 28). Polish independent studios are delivering a steady stream of interesting games to the world, and established studios continue to expand operations and bring on new development talent from across the globe. For once, it's Poland that's doing the conquering.

Poland Loves Cyberpunk

Cyberpunk 2077 may be getting all the attention, but it's far from the first cyberpunk game created in Poland. The country's long-standing fascination with the sci-fi subgenre is well chronicled through games like Bloober Team's Observer (pictured), Flying Wild Hog's Hard Reset, and Reikon Games' Ruiner.

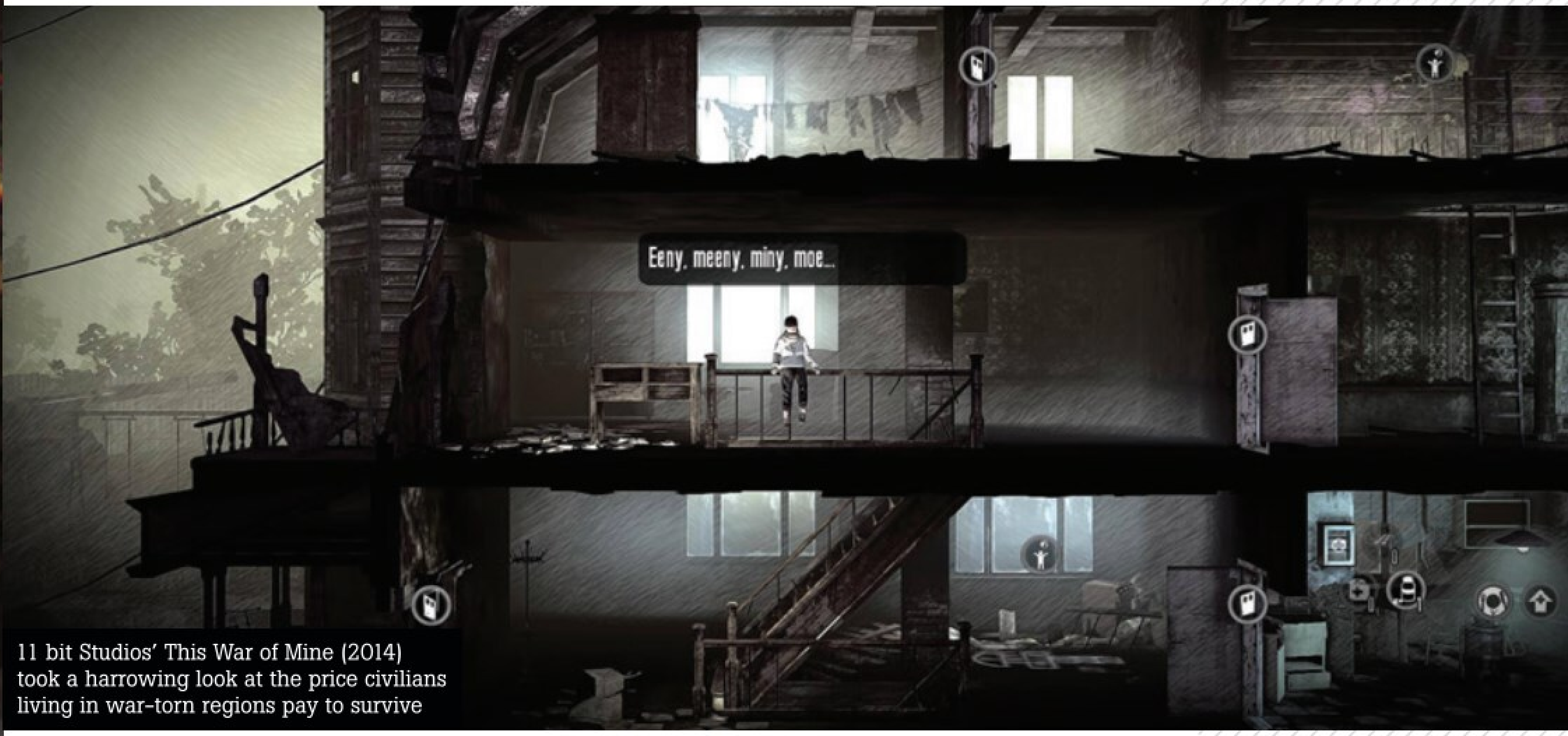
"Science fiction was generally popular in Poland," says Techland founder Pawel Marchewka. "I can't find someone of my age or 10 years younger who wouldn't like *Neuroshima, Cyberpunk 2020*, or *Blade Runner*. It's dark, and a lot of people like dark here, maybe because we're not as colorful a country as a place like California. I think there is something that the people here like dark, serious themes. We feel very much at home in it. We're into things that are darker than things like Fortnite or Unreal Tournament, where everything is exaggerated and super colorful."

"I don't think there's anything easier than finding a game dev job in Poland," Chmielarz says.

In just the next few years, you can look forward to titles like Dying Light 2, World War 3, Witchfire, and Cyberpunk 2077. When people ask what Poland is famous for, suddenly the answer isn't just sausage and vodka.

"That was Poland for me 10 to 15 years ago," Iwiński says. "Right now, Poland is famous for games. And that's an amazing feeling." ◈

Dead Island (2011) sold extremely well, but Techland delivered its best game with Dying Light (2015). The sequel is due in 2019



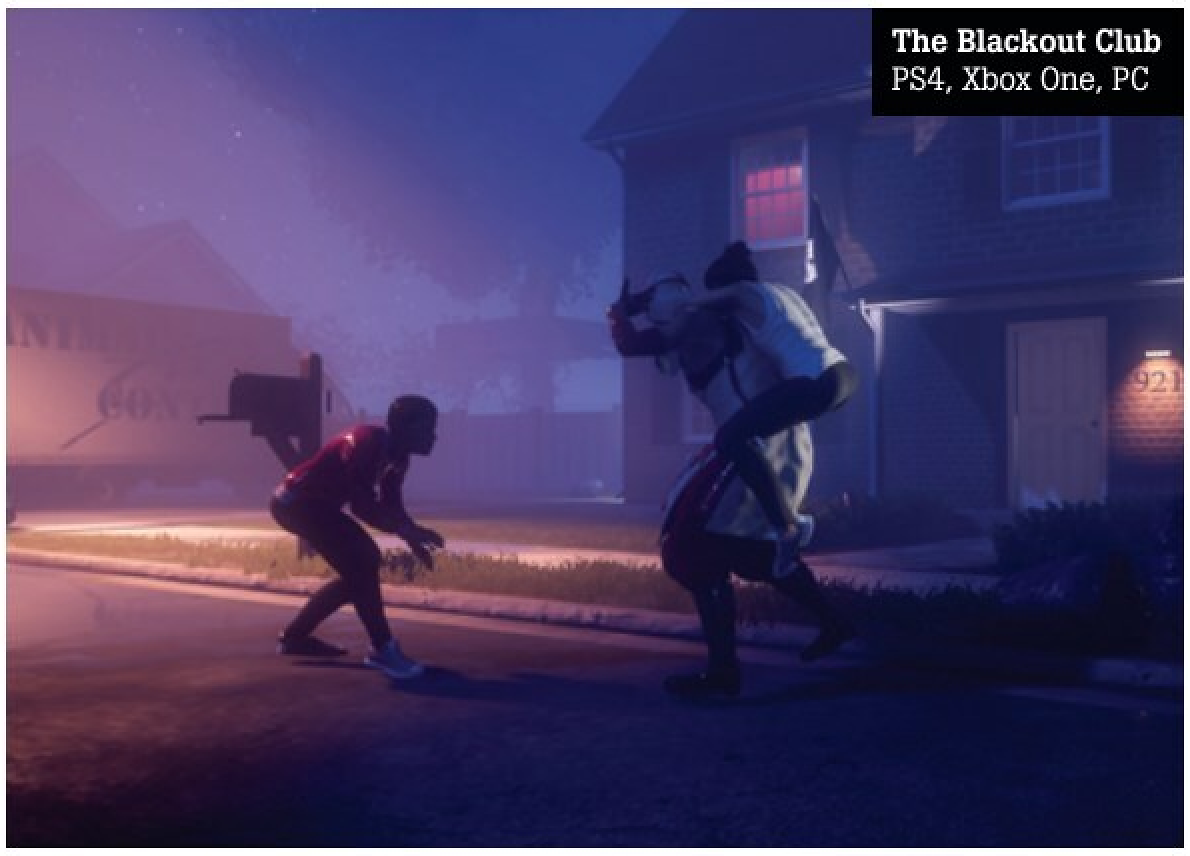
11 bit Studios' This War of Mine (2014) took a harrowing look at the price civilians living in war-torn regions pay to survive

The Blackout Club Takes Teen Horror Co-op

Nailing the sensation of fear in a game is always tricky, but it can be especially difficult when you can't rely on the isolation of a lonely and disconnected player. But that's exactly the challenge **The Blackout Club** hopes to confront, with a four-player online cooperative experience that shares cinematic DNA with properties like *Stranger Things, It,* and *The Goonies.* ***by Matt Miller***

Developer Question has some carryover DNA of its own, with lead positions filled by veterans of the BioShock and Dishonored franchise. That heritage is clear within minutes of diving into the game; a first-person perspective, a focus on atmospheric storytelling, and creative use of tools and navigation are all in evidence. But where those previous games were first and foremost adventures, The Blackout Club is clearly going for horror.

You control a kid living in an isolated town where things just aren't quite right. The familiar trappings of homes and daily life are a façade, hiding something sinister infesting the town. The grown-ups don't seem to get it, but some of the other kids do, and you've formed the Blackout Club to investigate the truth. A malevolent entity called the Shape is controlling everything around you, including your parents, and it's up to you to get to the bottom of whatever is happening, including the sudden disappearance of your best friend.



The Blackout Club
PS4, Xbox One, PC

After a brief (and creepy) intro mission sets the tone, it's time to create your character at the hideout, selecting cosmetic details as well as a smattering of tools and abilities that might give you an edge in your explorations. Perhaps you've managed to snag a grappling hook, or a taser. You might also be able to run a bit longer than your companions without getting tired, or gain the strength to knock someone out. The game features a full leveling and progression system as you develop your kid's capabilities, even as subsequent missions unlock new cosmetic customizations.

No matter your selections, as night falls it's time to head out to learn more about the secrets hiding underneath the town. Missions can be tackled in different regions, but the individual goals and paths are procedurally generated to some degree, offering variation in different missions. Sometimes you must retrieve valuable intelligence from a lost phone. At other times, you must rescue a fellow club member locked up by the bad guys.

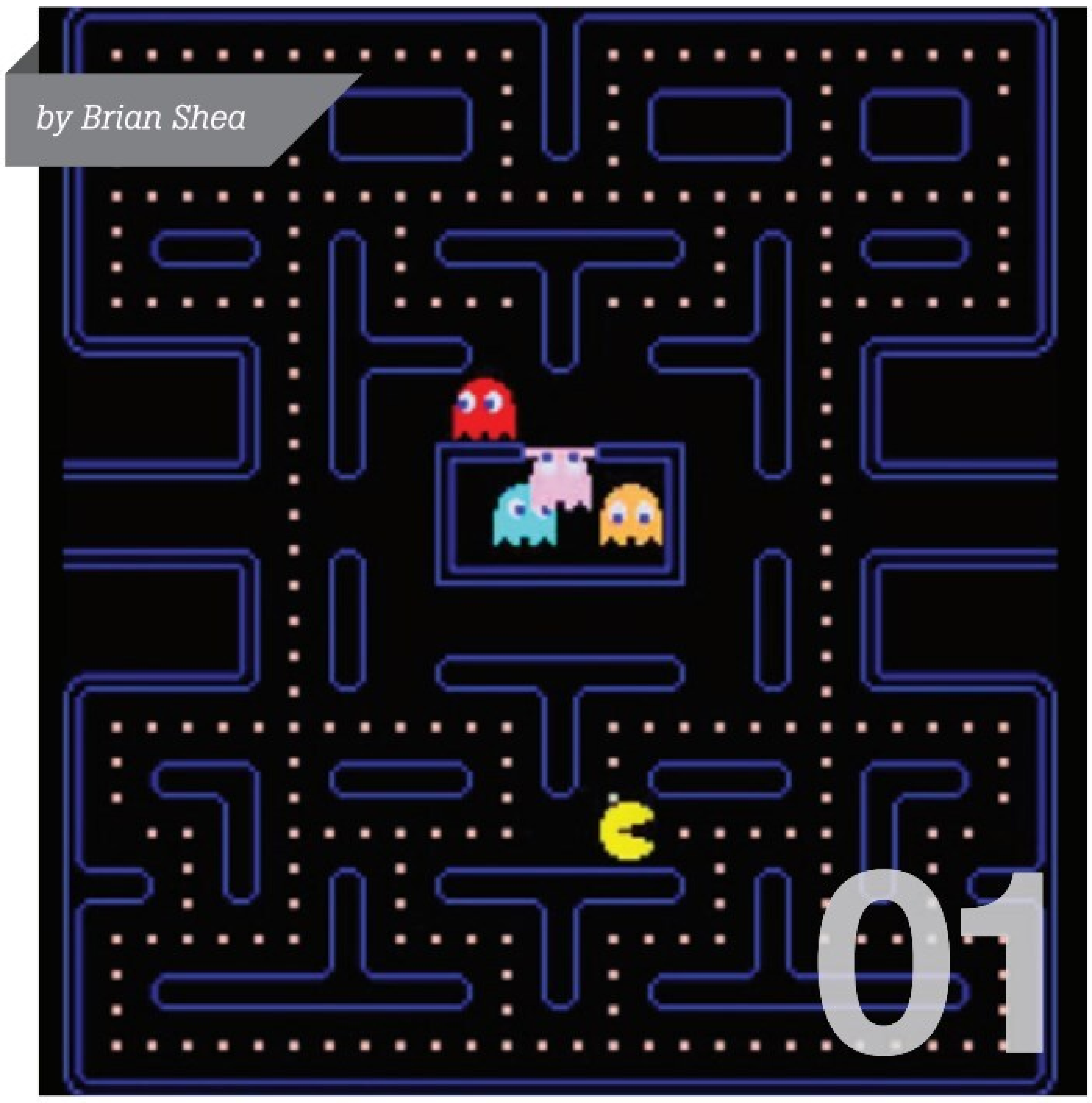
The houses of your pleasantly idyllic neighborhood inevitably hide routes into a labyrinthine tunnel network beneath town, filled with threatening devices and hollowed-out caverns, as if a vast construction site or movie set lies behind everything you thought you knew. Adults wander the space, many in a deluded and blind dream state. They can't see you, but the slightest noise brings their attention, and the game's notifications pop up that you've "committed a sin." Other adults are lucid and can see you, shining bright flashlights and aggressively tackling you to drag you away, and your limited strength and weaponry are rarely enough to fight them off more than a couple of times.

Behind it all is the Shape. The monster is invisible, but if you close your eyes (with a button press), everything else disappears, and you can see the creature stalking toward you. Get caught, and you lose control of your character, as your mind is overtaken and drawn into a waking nightmare. Only one of the other players can shake you out of it.

The Blackout Club has an intriguing premise, and after a few hours of tackling missions, I feel like there's a lot of potential. Rough spots are abundant at this early stage; missions need more variety, combat interactions are clumsy, and the integration and closeness of the Shape needs to be communicated more clearly (and with greater tension). Nonetheless, Question is exploring some cool ideas here, and I love the potential of cooperative first-person horror overlaid with a clear progression system. The layers of surreal imagery, conspiracy, and childhood friendship all have the potential to combine for a good adventure. The team has a good deal of time to flesh out and hone the experience before a release on PS4, Xbox One, and PC sometime in 2019, and it's a project I plan to follow closely on its road to launch.

GAMING CRAZES

by Brian Shea



Pac-Man

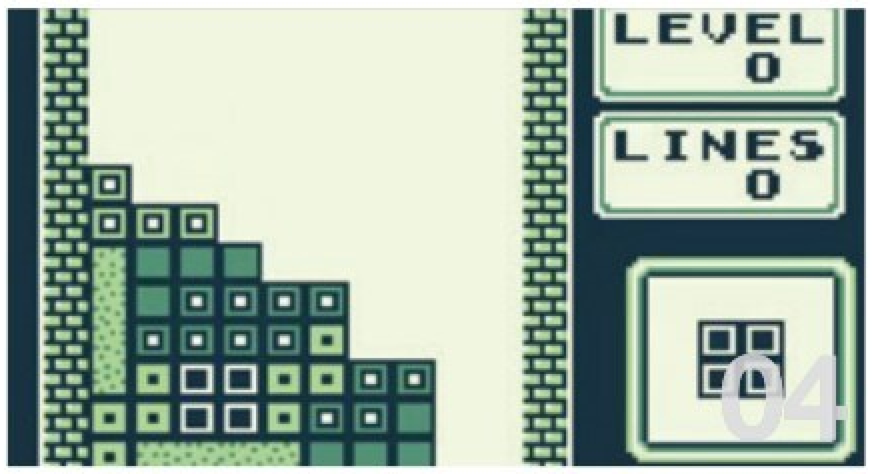
Few pop-culture icons are as synonymous with a period as Pac-Man is with the ’80s. The world took notice as people lined up at their local arcades to dodge ghosts and eat pellets. “Pac-Man Fever” became more than a joke about habitual players, as Buckner & Garcia scored a Billboard top 10 hit for their song about the phenomenon.

Pokémon Go

Pokémon has been a staple of the video game industry for two decades, but few games have ever been as inescapable as Pokémon Go when it launched in 2016. Literal mob scenes formed as augmented-reality Pokémon spawned in the real world, leading to zany news stories around the globe.

Fortnite

After the success of PlayerUnknown’s Battlegrounds, Epic Games pivoted its PvE base-building shooter to a free-to-play battle royale. It quickly became the game of choice for streamers and celebrities with Ninja and Drake teaming up for a record-breaking night on Twitch.



Tetris

The simple puzzle game by Russian designer Alexey Pajitnov expanded far beyond his Eastern European home to become a bona fide global hit across nearly every platform. The line-stacker remains popular to this day, still reigning as the best-selling game of all time.

Minecraft

The ultimate sandbox game, Mojang gives players all the tools they need to craft the world around them. Minecraft spread like wildfire following its official launch in 2011, going viral by way of social media, and is currently the second-highest selling game ever.

Wii Sports

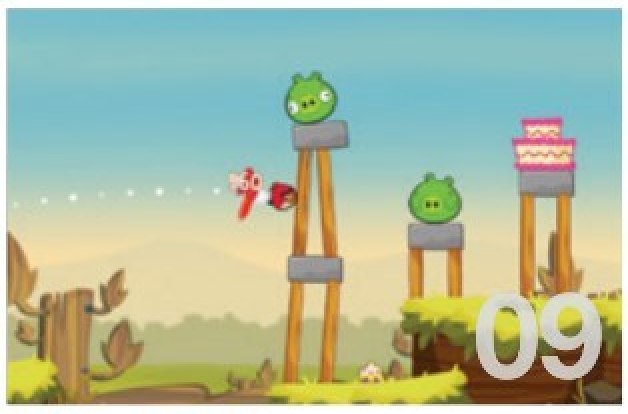
Wiis were hard to come by at launch, and its pack-in game was largely to blame. Wii Sports put motion controls on the map with its accessible athletic-inspired minigames that had everyone – from small children to grandparents – trying to improve their virtual bowling skills.

Guitar Hero

Deep down, everyone wants to be a rock star, but for most, Guitar Hero is as close as they’ll ever come. Using a plastic guitar controller to hit on-screen notes in time with a soundtrack full of popular songs made for an engaging experience whether alone or at a party.

FarmVille

For many of us, our experience with FarmVille is limited to ignoring Facebook invites from our aunts, but the game was an unrivaled hit when it launched in 2009. Tens of millions of players tended to their crops each day as they strived to have the most impressive farm of their friends.



Angry Birds

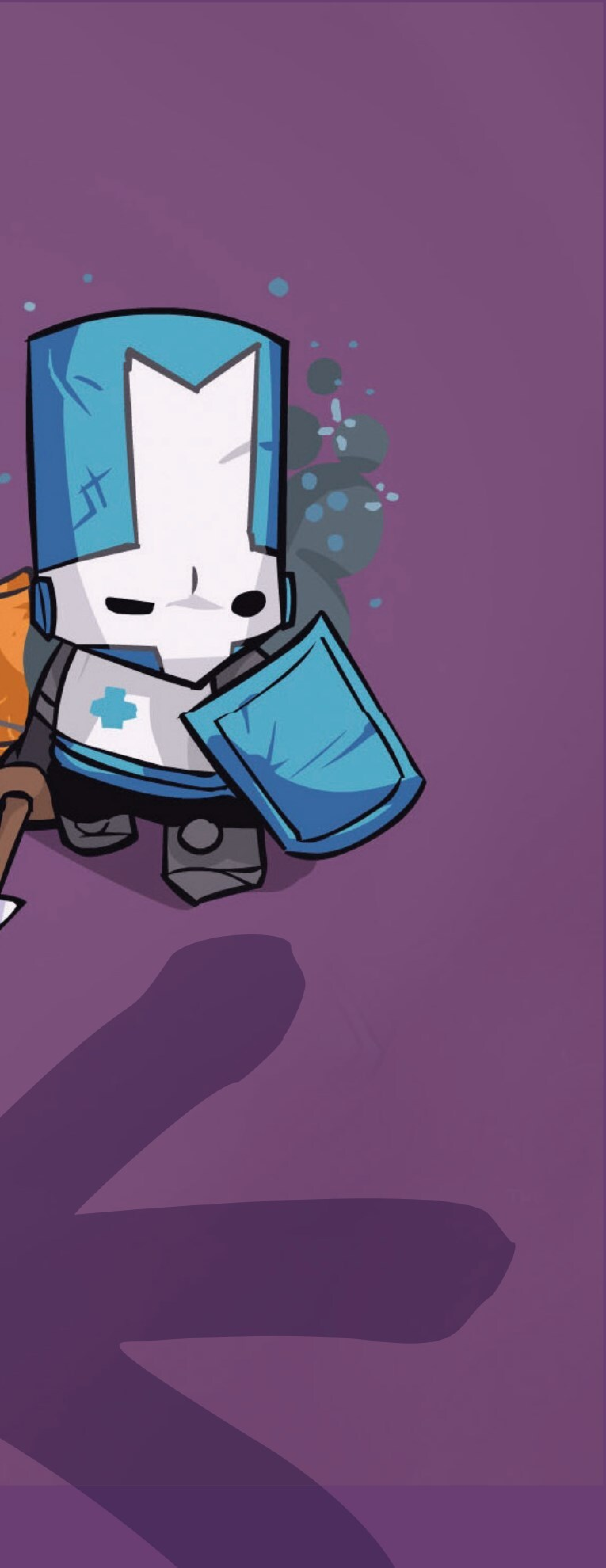
As smartphone gaming began to erupt, Angry Birds became the poster child for the platform. Delivering short gameplay sessions with intuitive touchscreen mechanics, you’d be hard pressed to find a smartphone user who didn’t have Rovio’s smash hit installed at one point.

The Sims

Who needs a real life when you can manage multiple virtual ones? SimCity developer Maxis leapt from city management to micromanagement as players could custom-build houses, then control nearly every aspect of its inhabitants’ day-to-day lives in one of the top-selling franchises ever. ◆

MORE THAN A
FLASH IN THE PAN

Dissecting Flash's lasting legacy on the game industry



D

During the ’90s, the internet slowly grew into a massive web of information that eventually reshaped entire industries. But access to that information was slow – it took nearly 10 minutes to download a single song – and web designers were in a constant battle to build splashy websites that didn’t cripple dial-up modems. To solve this problem, a group of engineers at FutureWave Software took a program, originally designed for drawing on tablet computers, and transformed it into a vector graphics animation tool that allowed animated images to swim through phone lines. FutureSplash Animator was eventually shortened to Flash, and it came to dominate the internet.

By the end of the decade, 99 percent of online computers ran Flash. In the early part of the new millennium, Flash became the backbone for nearly every major video player and website, including YouTube, Hulu, and BBC Online. Then something strange happened. Amateur programmers across the world took this software – initially built for graphic designers and started making games. Flash games became a billion-dollar business as sites like Newgrounds, Armor Games, and Kongregate attracted millions of users. Aspiring game developers created early versions of indie hits like Super Meat Boy, Bejeweled, VVVVVV, and Kingdom Rush. While no one was watching, Flash became one of the most important programing languages in the video game industry and sparked the indie game revolution.

And then it all came crashing down.

by Ben Reeves

331
7
964
5
2
BUTTERSCOTCH
INSTANT PUDDING

Alien Hominid

Breaking New Ground

When he was only 13-years-old, Tom Fulp started a fanzine for the ill-fated Neo Geo console. Fulp called his little magazine New Ground, which was a literal translation of the console's Latin name. As Fulp explored programming as a hobbyist, he moved his fanzine online and eventually created a series of websites. However, when Fulp went to register the domain NewGround.com, he discovered that the name had already been taken, so he simply added an "S" and hit submit. Fulp had no idea at the time, but his simple collection of message boards would eventually grow into one of the largest wells of free online games.

Through Newgrounds.com, Fulp met like-minded gamers who weren't content merely absorbing the latest gaming blockbusters – they were eager to make their own games. Using HTML and Javascript, Fulp did just that. The young programmer achieved a small amount of internet notoriety with two early hits: Club A Seal, which let players click on pictures of seals to club them, and Assassin, which allowed users to assassinate popular celebrities. Then one day, a friend told Fulp about Flash.

"Flash was the first software that did what I'd always been dreaming of growing up," Fulp says. "Originally, I would do animation on an Amiga with Deluxe Paint and then move it over to a PC to program with Pascal, but I always thought, 'Why can't I connect my animations to my code?' There was never an easy way to do that. You'd have to get into all this crazy graphics programming stuff. When Flash came along, I was able to animate a character walking and it was immediately in the game. There was really nothing like it. It just made everything so easy."

Through the Newgrounds community, Fulp met another artist named Dan Paladin. The duo created a Flash game called Alien Hominid, a side-scrolling shooter starring a cutesy alien who blasted through wave after wave of secret government agents. Alien Hominid was such a hit that Fulp and Paladin teamed up with a few other friends to found their own company, The Behemoth, which went on to release successful indie titles like Castle Crashers, BattleBlock Theater, and Pit People. However, The Behemoth's early successes, Alien Hominid

ALIEN HOMINID
FBI

and Castle Crashers, would not have been possible without Flash.

The Behemoth wasn't the only team of indie game makers who cut their teeth on Flash. Back in 1998, when Newgrounds was a simple collection of chat rooms and message boards, Fulp introduced a feature to the site called the Portal. This Portal was intended to allow experimental game makers to share their work with others.

"There wasn't really a dedicated Flash game site," Fulp says. "The Portal was originally something I was manually updating because there were people who made Flash games but had nowhere to showcase them, so they would email me their files and I would stick them in. It wasn't even an important part of the site, it was just a place for unfinished projects – but then more and more people were emailing me and it was becoming a real chore to constantly update."

To solve this headache, in 2000, Fulp automated the entire process. Now, when users submitted their Flash creations to Newgrounds, they would instantly upload to the site. This simple feature came to define Newgrounds and helped transform Fulp's fansite into one of the most visited gaming destinations on the internet. And as Newgrounds' collection of free games ballooned, many realized they could make money on Flash games. A lot of money.

23
56
4
4
FBI
22
52
4
7

Tom Fulp and Dan Paladin's Alien Hominid was so successful that it launched their career into the game industry and allowed them to form the indie studio The Behemoth

Hot Flash

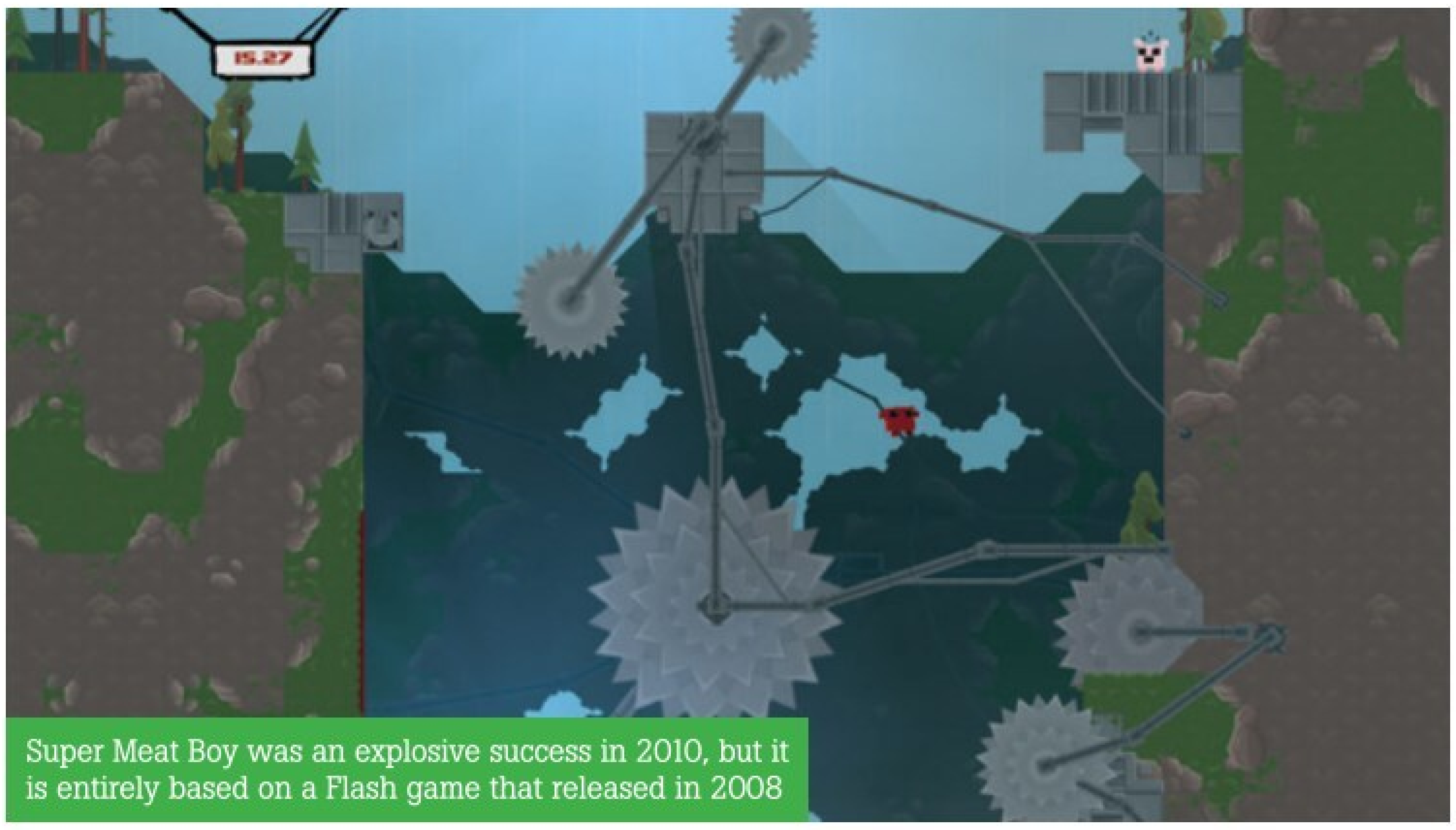
By the mid-2000s, Flash games were booming. Flash's ease of use attracted gamers who wanted to experiment with making games but weren't sure where to start. Flash was easy to use, and users could prototype projects at breakneck speed. For example, the original Meat Boy only took three weeks to make, and other creators we talked with said they heard of people turning games around in one or two days.

"It was so accessible," says Emily Greer, co-founder and CEO of the Flash games site Kongregate. "You started with art rather than with code, so a lot of people who wouldn't have sat down and written object-oriented code could sort of baby step their way into very serious programming through Flash. It was a rapid-fire learning tool."

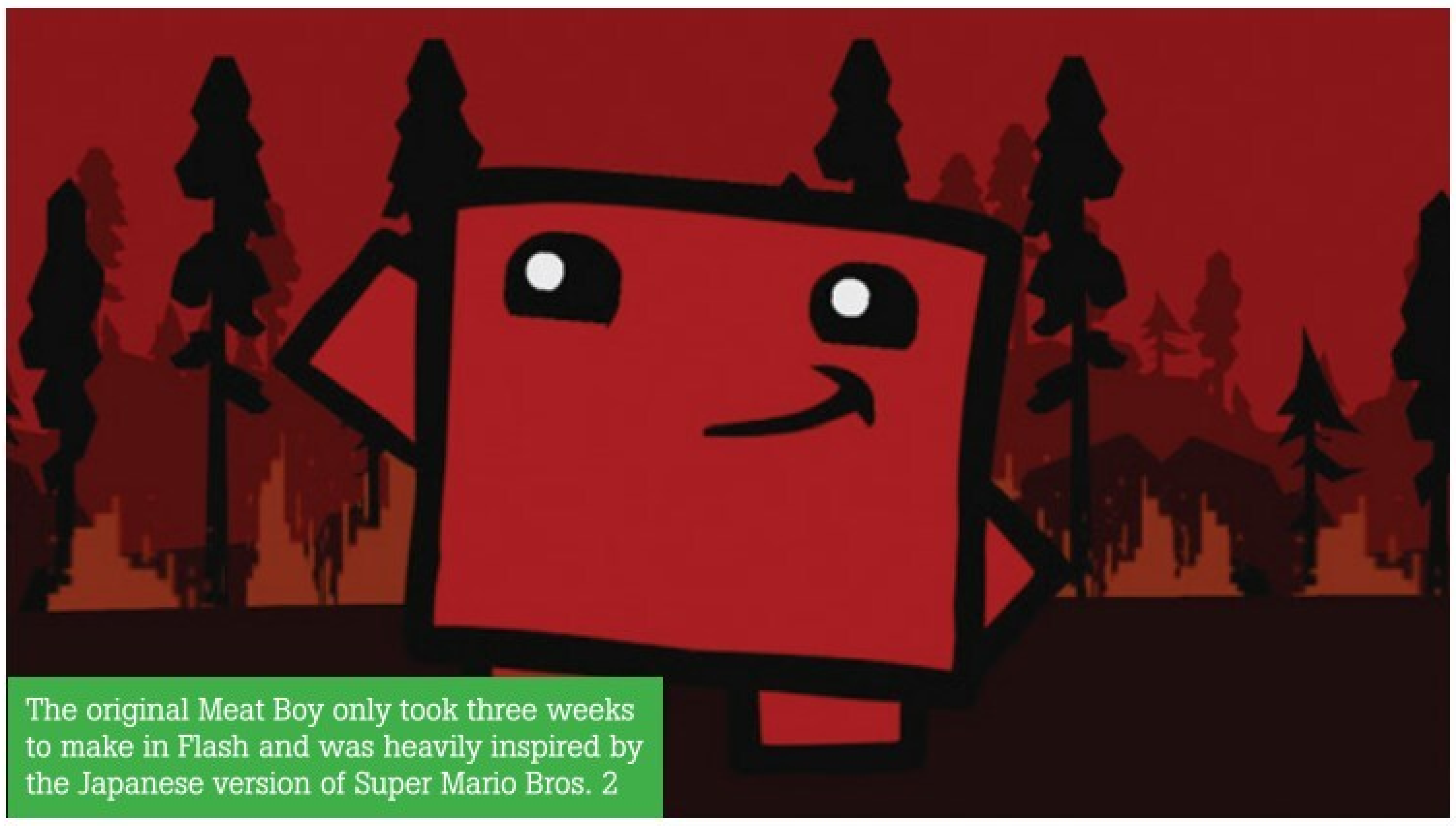
"The thing that made it most appealing was the fact that you could make something in a very short amount of time and you could make something pretty impressive visually," says Edmund McMillen, co-creator of indie hits Super Meat Boy and The Binding of Isaac. "So you could instantly make something that was very accessible and exciting and then instantly upload it and have hundreds of thousands of people playing your game."

For many online gamers, this glut of Flash games was an incredible boon. Of course, these quirky browser-based games lacked the graphical fidelity of big-budget console releases like Gears of War and BioShock, and Flash games could be janky. But that jank didn't matter, because Flash games were free and they didn't involve a long install process. Users didn't have to worry about system configurations or their PC's specs. Flash games just worked. And there were millions of them.

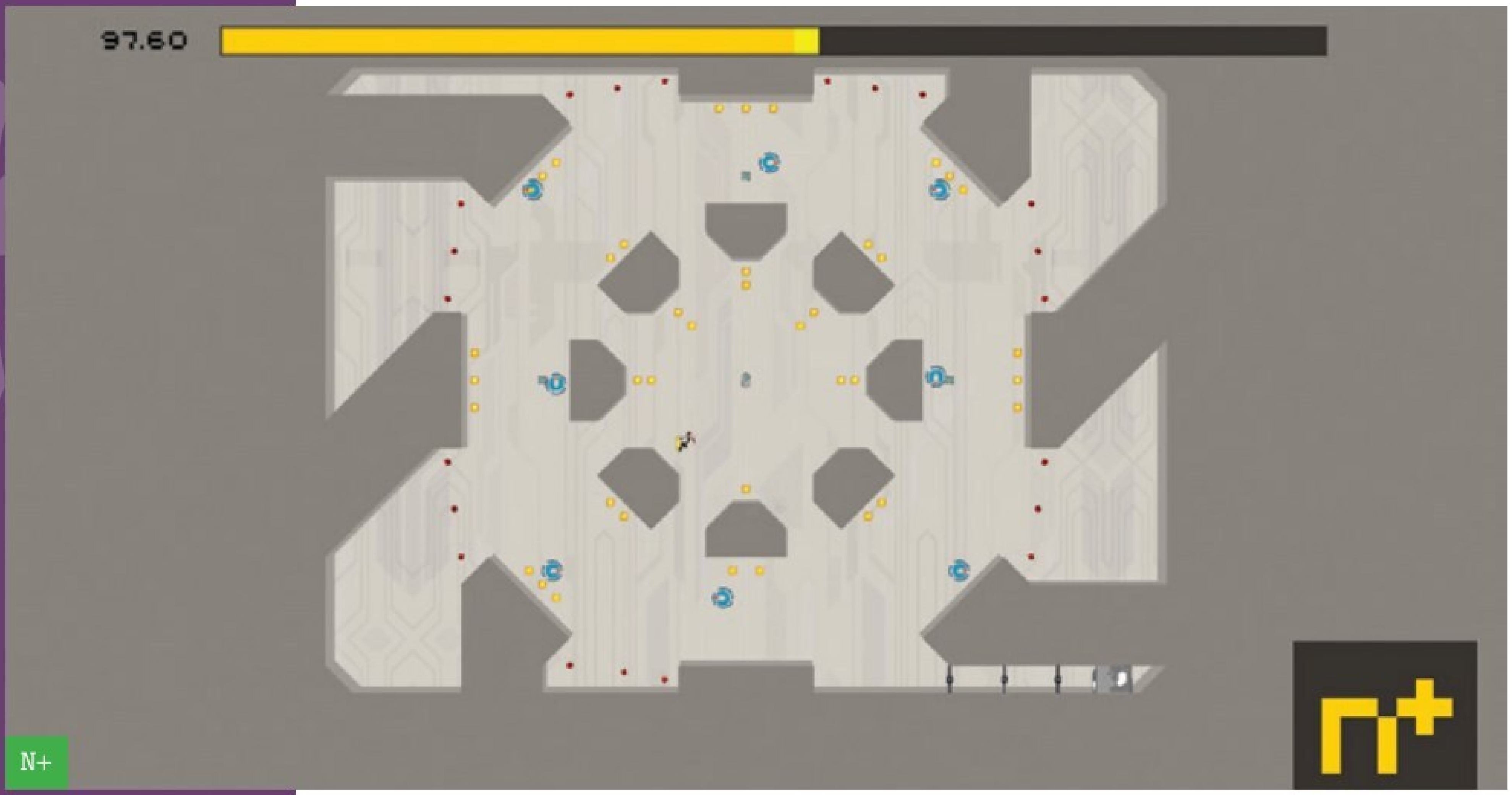
"The way that Flash ran in a browser was probably the biggest piece to its popularity," says Raigan Burns, co-creator of the Flash-based series N+. "Even if you were already making free games, getting people to just download your game was hard, because they'd have to click and save it and then open the zip file and then who knows what else. Flash was super easy to use from both a user and creator standpoint. I know there were other game making-tools, like Klik & Play, that made making games easy, but they weren't as integrated with the tools you used to make the graphics and animation."



Super Meat Boy was an explosive success in 2010, but it is entirely based on a Flash game that released in 2008



The original Meat Boy only took three weeks to make in Flash and was heavily inspired by the Japanese version of Super Mario Bros. 2



N+

Metanet Software's N series started out as a game jam project. The game took advantage of Flash's vector graphics, which allowed for platforming that was precise down to the pixel

While most Flash games were free for the user, people found ways to squeeze cash out of Flash's online ecosystem. In 2005 and 2006, other popular websites like Kongregate and Armor Games joined Newgrounds and began sponsoring creators for exclusive rights to host their games. Some sites offered achievement-like challenges and other social systems to help retain their userbase. In turn, hosting sites made money by running ads before, and sometimes during, gameplay. A few companies tried collecting thousands of Flash games onto discs with the aim of releasing them at retail. Meanwhile, Target even tested bundling popular Flash games, like Triachnid, with printed tees that featured characters from the game.

"I got contacted by a s---load of seed investors and these crazy money people who were like, 'Hey, we're hearing about you, and we think that indie games are going to be the next big thing.'" McMillen says. "And they were right, because two years later, indie was huge. In the boom of the sponsorships you could make up to 12 or even 20 grand a game depending on your reputation and that was just for sponsorship, so you didn't have to sell the IP."

However, by the end of the decade, the gold rush was over and the sponsorships dried up. Flash's online relevance dwindled as the mobile and free-to-play markets cut into its popularity. Its days were numbered.

Castle Crashers

Birth Of Indie Nation

In January of 2007, Steve Jobs took the stage at the Macworld convention in San Francisco to introduce the world to the iPhone. This seemingly magical device was poised to completely transform social networking, mobile gaming, and a host of other daily activities. It put the internet in our pockets and gave us access to a growing list of revolutionary applications. The one thing it didn't do, however, was support Flash.

Apple shunned Flash because of its proprietary nature, its negative effect on battery life, and the fact that it was easy to hack. This was the first nail in Flash's coffin. Over the years, other companies followed Apple's lead. Today, most web browsers don't natively support Flash. Adobe has even announced it plans to stop supporting the software by 2020.

But the impact of Flash on the video game market – particularly the indie scene – is undeniable. When Flash games hit their stride in the mid-2000s, indie games weren't even on the industry's radar. Braid and World of Goo are often considered "early" indie hits, but those titles didn't release until 2008. Minecraft's first public release was in May of 2009. Journey and Fez released in 2012. Flash games predate them all.

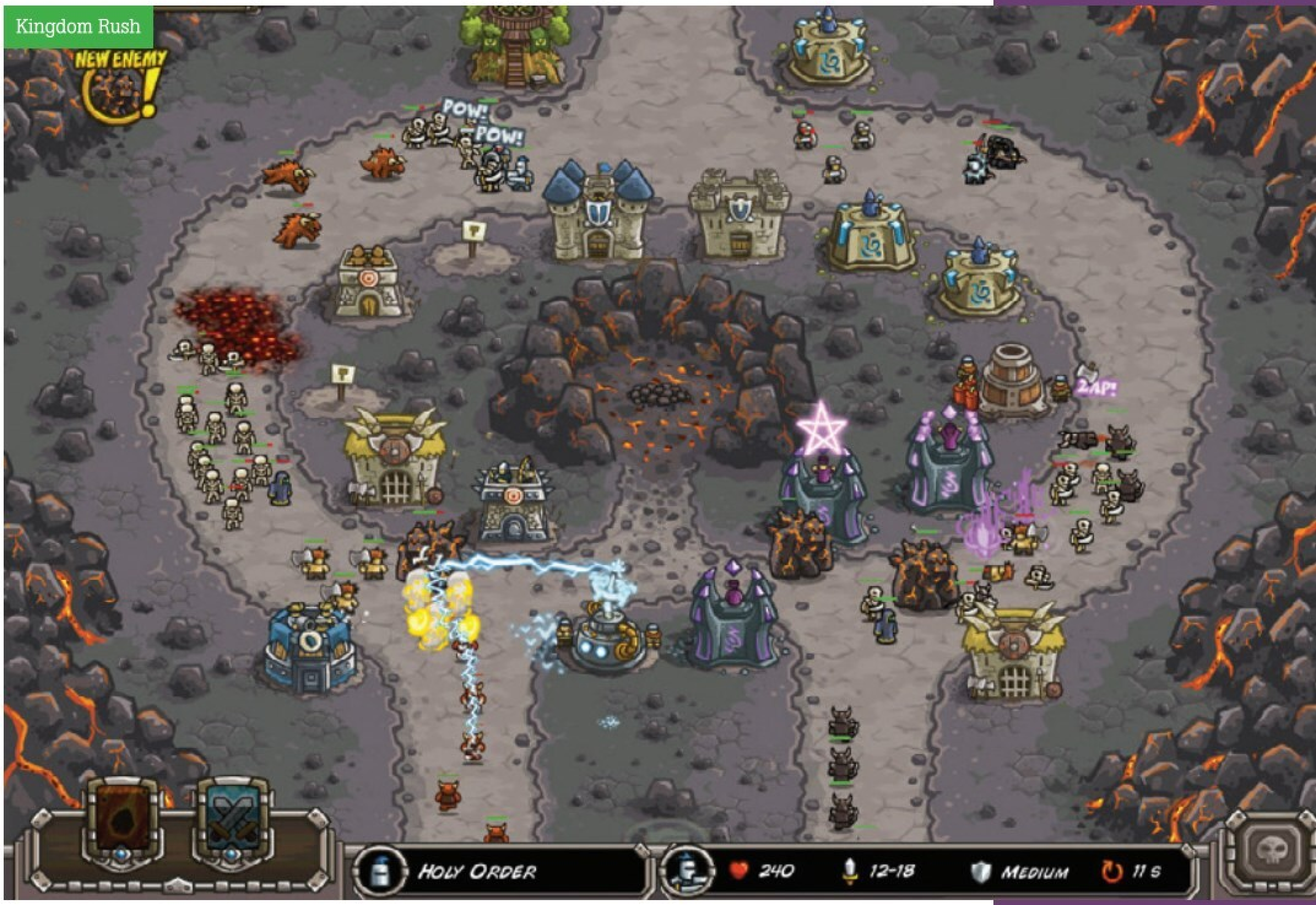
"Flash is the original indie scene," Greer says. "The rapid prototyping. The wild creativity. The direct distribution to players. All those come from the Flash scene. It was the first time that amateurs were jumping in to make games and have them be played not just by millions but billions of people."

Flash's influence on the modern video game landscape is hard to quantify. Flash creators practically invented the tower defense genre, and many draw a line from those early Flash strategy game to the explosive success of Supercell's Clash of Clans. Another mobile juggernaut, Angry Birds, was unashamedly inspired by a Flash game called Crush the Castle. Game developers who grew up using Flash have gone on to create indie gems like Ridiculous Fishing, Frog Fractions, Getting Over It with Bennett Foddy, and Celeste. In 2012, a group of Flash animators met on Newgrounds and formed Studio Yotta, a successful freelance animation studio that has worked on games like Skullgirls as well as the Cartoon Network show *OK K.O.!*

Even after Adobe puts Flash to bed, the program could remain an important tool for indie developers. A number of designers we spoke with admitted they still use Flash for rapid prototyping and laying the framework for new games. In spite of the wealth of cheap, modern game development tools like Unreal Engine, Unity, and GameMaker Studio, some developers prefer Flash for its ease of use.

"I'd like to say that Flash is pretty f---ing important, but I'm probably saying that because it's so important to me," McMillen says. "It's probably one of the most important things in my career. If Flash didn't exist, I definitely wouldn't be making video games. Growing up, I thought that if you wanted to make video games, you had to work with 50 other people. I figured no one would listen to my weird ideas. 'Yes! The crying child who cries on s---. That's the idea we should bank on!' But Flash made it so that you only needed one or two people to make a game. Your voice could be heard."

For decades, the video game industry was filled with big publishers and other gatekeepers who dictated the release calendar. But today, it is easier than ever to create a game and see it published. Flash was one of the first tools that opened the market and allowed gamers to hear from a new host of creative voices. Flash formed the foundation for the modern indie scene, and we're better off for it. ◆


Kingdom Rush

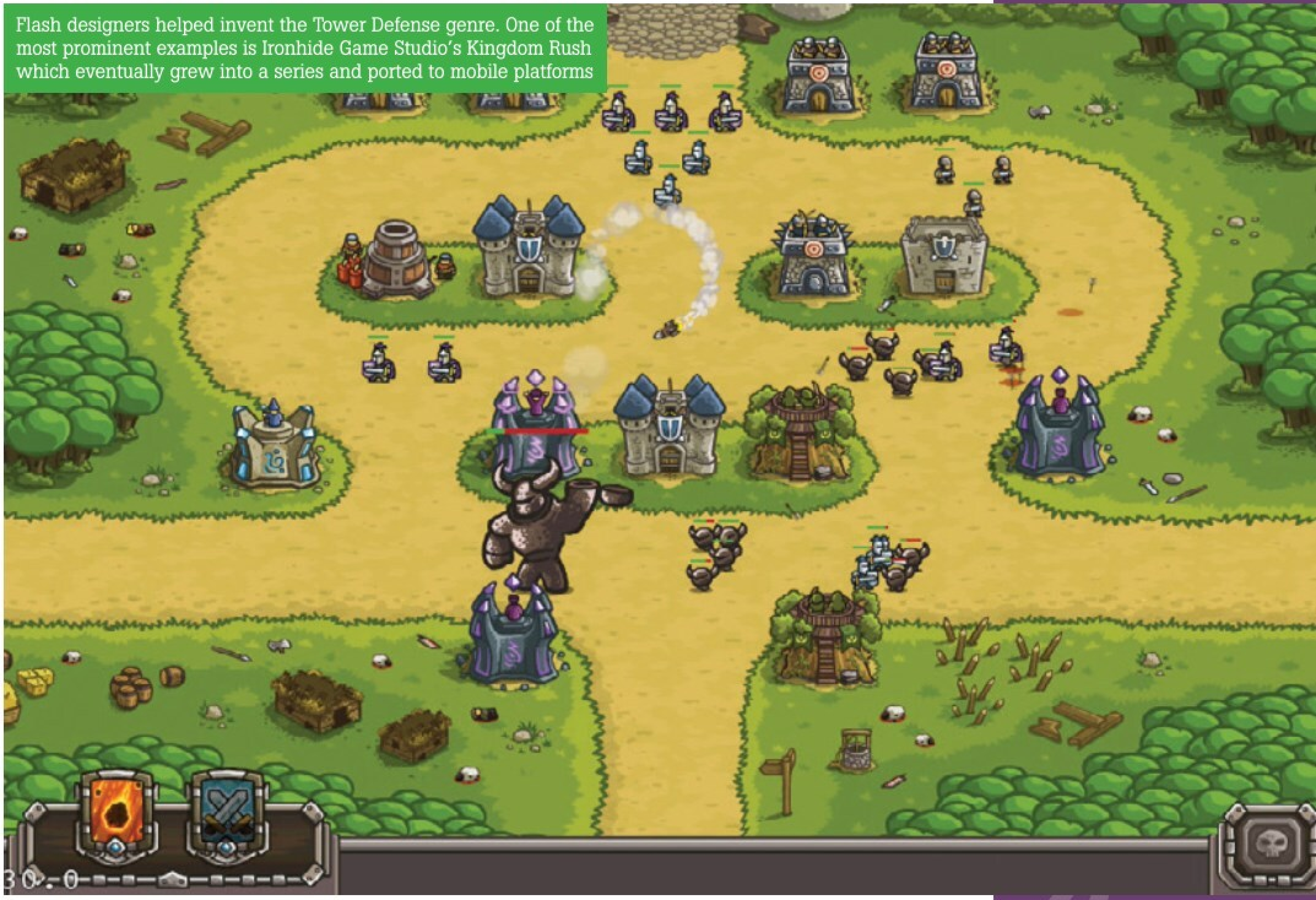
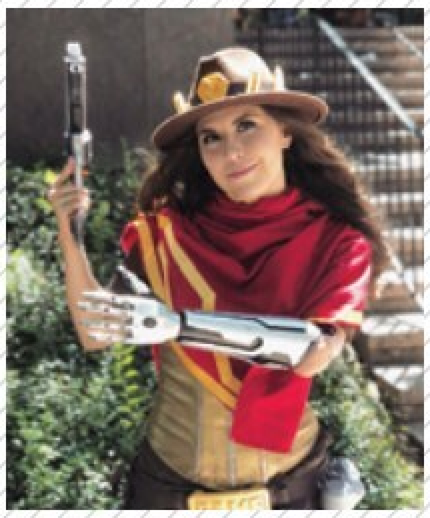

Flash designers helped invent the Tower Defense genre. One of the most prominent examples is Ironhide Game Studio's Kingdom Rush which eventually grew into a series and ported to mobile platforms

photo: James Alexander Young



Name:
Angel Giuffria

Occupation:
Actress

Twitter:
@Aannggeellll

The Bionic Actress

When representation and advocacy meet cosplay

Angel Giuffria was born with her left arm missing below the elbow, but that hasn't stopped her from having a successful acting career, appearing in the likes of *The Green Lantern* and *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay*, as well as shining a spotlight on disability representation in gaming culture.

interview by Javy Gwaltney

How did you get involved with advocacy?
My mom is a badass. Because she fought with insurance companies and raised funds, I was able to be the youngest person in the world to wear a myoelectric prosthesis. My mom also made it so if there was anyone with a limb difference, we'd go out and meet all these people and show them how I had adapted to life with the prosthesis.

The new generation of arms, called multi-articulating hands, came out in 2008, but they were massive. They were designed mostly for male stature, bigger bodies. I had to wait for them to scale it down. Four years ago, they came out with the first bebionic hand, which was the first small-sized, multi-articulating hand. I loved the hand so much I just wanted to continue to talk to people about it.

How do video games fit into your life?
Gaming has always been a part of my life. My older brother, we're 17 months apart, we played a lot of games together growing up. My favorite games are the cinematic ones, decision-based games. A lot of that has to do with the fact that I felt like I couldn't play games like they were intended to be played because of some of the adaptations I'd have to make.

My little arm is pretty fat and round and my prosthesis can't articulate well enough to hold a controller in the right way so games I loved to watch are Mass Effect and Fable and Elder Scrolls. I just felt like I couldn't play them the way I wanted to but saying that, I just ordered an Xbox Adaptive Controller because I'm interested in starting to play again.

Speaking of the Xbox Adaptive Controller, what did you think of that reveal?
I was stoked when it was announced. I had partners who were like "I'll buy you a one-handed controller! It's like $500." It just used to make me so mad, that there wasn't an affordable option for accessibility. However, when the big companies start doing stuff like that, it sets a tone for everyone to join in and say "This is important. This is something that should be happening."

In the realm of disability, I wish this stuff had existed 10 years ago. But I'm also so happy that it exists now and that they're working towards making a more inclusive scene for everyone.

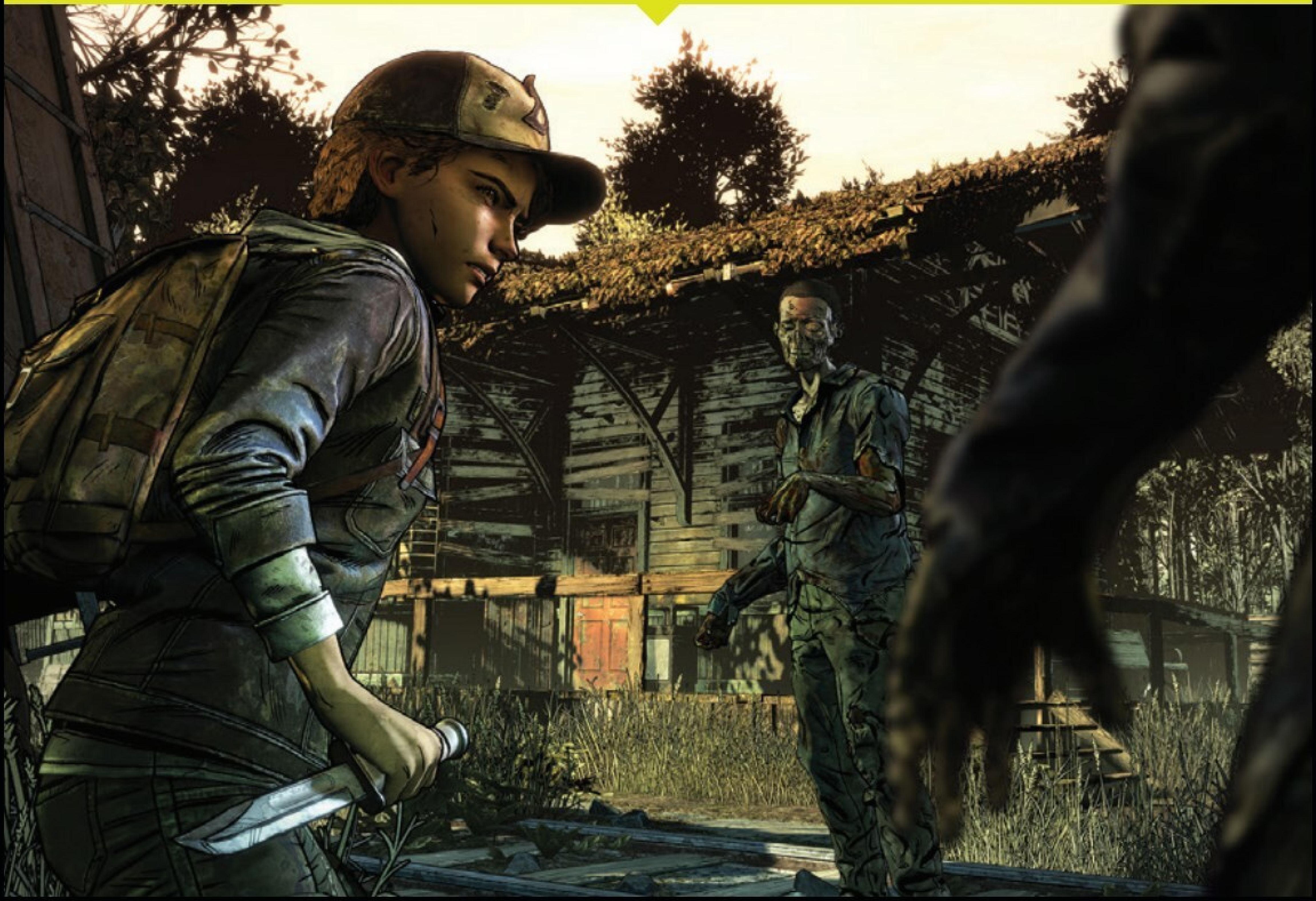
Your McCree cosplay is impressive. How did you put it together?
When Overwatch came out, I was really pumped. I remember seeing all these different characters who had limb differences or amputations or just some cool mod and thinking, "This is good representation." Some people said I should do Symmetra, but that's not my style and I don't know what her limb difference actually is. I wanted to do McCree. He was top of my list for a while. My friend Trace, who also has a limb difference, got a 3D printer and made me the accessories as a Christmas present.

We worked back and forth sending text messages. I'm usually pretty in control of my cosplays, but it was nice to go back and forth with someone who also has a limb difference and feel like we were doing something cool together – to have this awesome representation of this character who's an amputee.

What is it about cosplay that appeals to you?
Cosplay is so amazing. As an actress, I love playing dress-up, but then I found out you could do it outside of Halloween and I was absolutely pumped. My first cosplay as a limb-different person was Rose McGowan from Planet Terror. I remember a lot of people being confused where my arm was and that made me feel like cosplay with limb-different characters needs to be around more. Rose McGowan wasn't an amputee, that wasn't a person with a limb difference. People need to see that limb-different people can do those roles as well. I started feeling empowered with the ability to play these badass characters.

Missing a limb opens up so many doors in cosplay. It's a window into how many don't realize that there are characters out there missing limbs. It's the idea that I'm showing you the representation that we have right now. Obviously, I could cosplay as a non-limb-different character and just cosplay them with a missing a limb. That's fine. But I like showing what exists.

The Good



Despite the closure of The Walking Dead developer Telltale Games and the series being put in limbo, **SKYBOUND GAMES** has reached a deal to conclude the game's final season (the first two episodes are still available for purchase). Skybound CEO Ian Howe says the current plan is to try and employ members of the original Telltale staff to finish out the franchise with the team's vision hopefully intact. There is no timetable for the rest of the season's release, but we hope Howe and Skybound can pull off their plan.

The Bad

Blizzard has thrown a damper on a report saying **DIABLO III** crossplay between the PS4, Xbox One, and Switch versions of the title is coming, stating it has no current plans for such a feature.

The Ugly

NHL team the **VANCOUVER CANUCKS** have banned playing video games such as Fortnite while on roadtrips. "In my opinion, there's better ways to spend time on the road, whether it's hanging with the guys in the room or going to a movie with the guys," center and alternate captain Bo Horvat told Vancouver radio station TSN 1040. "There's a lot of cool cities we visit and to be cooped up in your room all night, playing Fortnite, is a waste of your time. Hopefully a lot of parents and little kids are listening right now. I don't play it. Nor will I ever." ◆

Quotable

"It's really unclear what we would even do with it, let alone how upset people would get with whatever we did."

Dan Houser, Rockstar Games co-founder says he's "thankful" he's not making Grand Theft Auto VI in the current, charged political climate where the series' satire might easily be overshadowed by today's stranger-than-fiction news.

KÖNIG SALOMONS
GRUBE EIGENTUM DER
HEINRICH HÖRNER
AKTIEN GESELLSCHAFT,
1923

THE DIGITAL ARCHAEOLOGISTS

How GOG.com rescues games from the dustbin of history

by Matt Bertz

It may not have the clout of Steam, but over the last decade GOG.com has slowly and steadily built its reputation as an attractive alternative digital marketplace for PC gamers. The CD Projekt subsidiary frequently generates headlines for its impassioned stance against digital rights management – if you buy a game on GOG you own it – but perhaps its most important work ties into games preservation.

For the past 10 years, the company has tracked down license holders for long-lost games no longer available for purchase and painstakingly resurrected them to work on modern PCs. The list of titles GOG has saved from obscurity is impressive, from floppy disc classics like the Dungeons & Dragons "Gold Box" games of the late '80s and early '90s to more recent cult favorites like Irrational's beloved tactical shooter SWAT 4. But this process is rarely as easy as picking up the phone and meeting for a handshake deal. Licensing rights are inherently transitory; the further you get from the date of the original release, the more likely you're going to run into a roadblock as companies close, creators die, and paper trails disappear. In extreme cases, GOG has hired private investigators to help track down rights owners.

"Finding out who has the rights can be impossible," says Marta Adamska, head of business development at GOG. Dead ends are common as they trace company liquidations and genealogical trees to figure out who may hold the key to bringing back a classic game, but through persistent scavenging GOG has managed to bring back some games that were otherwise lost to history. "I guess the biggest spectacular one was in 2015 when we signed the 13 Forgotten Realms games," Adamska says. "It was just a nightmare because games were written and created in a way where the author of everything maintained the rights for it – the IP, the image, the music, the code, dialogue, story – everything."

Once Adamska's team finds the rights holder, they aren't always so keen to cooperate. Bitter divorcees uninterested in propping up their former partner's legacy, relatives who have little to no interest in video games, and people too rich to bother can require a lot of persuasion to cooperate. "We've had a few stories where we had to travel to very random places and meet random people," Adamska says. The quest for the rights for the Kohan series led them to the doorstep of an oil baron who acquired the rights via the acquisition of a well-liquidated company. "We go there and we're like, 'Hey this game is awesome and we're sure that it can make you $50,000,'" Adamska remembers. But when a wealthy person makes that much money at the snap of their fingers, that argument can ring hollow.

EGG
MOZZARELLA
PROVOLONE
BEL PAESE
GORGONZOLA
PAMERINO
PARMESAN
GOAT'S CHEESE
PARSLEY
LEMON BALM
SAGE
GINGER
OREGANO
11-AUG-1995 19:20
SAGE
4 GRAMMES
1 CALORIES
INTENSITY: 15
FAT : 0
SWEET: 1
SALTY: 1
HOT : 1
TREND: 0
(NEUTRAL)
1749440

Pizza Connection

Anachronox

23505
Temple

Dungeon Keeper

SPECIAL ORDERS...
DESTROY BLUES GUN EMPLACEMENT
FOR 40000CR.
TIME 6.17
200
300
UNIT READY
7914
DESTRUCT
EXIT

7th Legion

The prospect of a free check interests some, but others are more moved to cooperate when Adamska demonstrates how the game in question still resonates with nostalgic fans. GOG has an active community where users keep a running wish list for games they want to see restored. Seeing the fan demand can often be the push the license holder needs to sign a deal.

The community also helps out when the GOG team runs into dead ends tracking down who controls the rights to a particular game. “Whenever we are lost we can write on a forum and say, ‘Hey guys, there's this game and we have talked this guy and they said it's a no. This company is a no, and this company is a no. Who else do you think might have been involved?’” Adamska says. “Suddenly, [the community will go], ‘Oh yeah, the rights went to that guy.’ We're like, ‘It took us three years to get here and it just took them one forum post!”

Once GOG acquires a game license, the heavy lifting transfers to their team of PC experts who modernize the game with some smart reverse engineering techniques. With the help of the DOSBox creators, GOG has created a multi-step process that helps them get the games up to speed. Sometimes, a miracle happens and the game is ready to go with the application of a few “wrappers” and some compatibility passes. But for the more complicated titles, the process can take up to six months.

While prepping a legacy title for release, GOG testers are required to play through the entire game to look for game-breaking bugs. In worst-case scenarios, they must play through the games several times before it’s in good enough shape to ship. Sometimes, this laborious process reveals some anachronistic errors. “With one real-time strategy game the A.I. was connected to the processor cycles, so basically it turned out it was impossible to finish even the first mission because your A.I. opponent kept building units at an extremely high rate so you were destroyed in like five minutes,” says Marcin Paczyński, who heads up GOG’s product team. “The tester who was playing it didn't tell anyone about him being destroyed by A.I. at first because he thought it was just him being bad at it.”

Testers also occasionally find interesting Easter eggs buried deep in the programming. “During our work on the Dungeon Keeper game, in the code we found an actual letter from one of the developers who described their last day of development before the game was supposed to be shipped,” Paczyński says. “He basically described an entire office where people were exhausted but very happy.”

For GOG, restoration isn’t complete once the code is up to snuff and the game runs well on modern PCs. They understand the heavy sense of nostalgia many players formed around the box art, manual, and trinkets that came with the original versions, so they go out of their way to retrieve and digitize these elements for inclusion. Sometimes they even recreate the anti-piracy code wheels that came with games in the early ’90s to give players a glimpse of a bygone era. Once these final touches are made, then it’s time to release the game, but that’s not the end of the job. From release day forward, GOG maintains each title to make sure it is compatible with the most recent chipsets, graphics cards, and operating systems.

“One of the things I think that differentiates us from other platforms is we never stop caring about games,” Paczyński says. “What that means is that whenever there is a new machine, a new version of Windows, or drivers, we try to make our entire catalog work on this new system.” GOG is currently in the midst up of updating all its legacy titles for Windows 10, a job it hopes to have completed by the end of the year.

Just like any other digital marketplace, GOG’s catalog continues to expand with a curated collection of new games. But GOG’s work recovering and restoring these good old games is its defining characteristic. Future generations don’t need to travel to a video game museum to experience the formative titles of the medium’s past; they can log into their browsers and hit a download button instead. ◆

photo: Dan Pineda

Eyes On The Prize

Few people can say they started a career when they were still in high school, but Geoff Keighley knew what he wanted to do well before he had his driver's license. From tester to journalist, he's worn many hats in his long video game career, and is now the host of the Game Awards. We talked to Keighley about his lucky breaks and his continued fascination with games.

Take me back to your first video game memory. Were you hooked immediately?
My first experiences with games started when I was a kid. I remember my mother, who ran the books for my dad's business in Toronto, always had an IBM PC in the office. When I was five years old, instead of going to piano lessons or anything like that, I went to computer classes. I went to this lady's house where I learned to type and used programs like Reader Rabbit and Turtle Tracks. The first skill I learned was working on a computer. This was the '80s, and computers were just starting to get into homes. I was the right age at the right time to start learning about them, and it was through the prism of education software. From there it grew to playing some of the early adventure games. I remember playing Willow from Lucasfilm and early Sierra games on an IBM PC in the family room. My brother and I would sit there and play games. We then got consoles from Sega and Nintendo.

When did you learn you wanted to be involved in video games as a career?
It was a natural evolution from playing those adventure games. I got really into them. At the time, I was starting to get into [online bulletin-board

systems] and CompuServe for hints in those games. Back then, I was effectively charged by the minute for activity because I was paying long distance from Toronto to California, so I would try to game the system and figure out how many minutes it would take me to get a hint to progress in my adventure game.

I was playing these adventure games during my school years, and found this community around them that fascinated me. I always wondered how games were made, so one day when I was 12 years old, I wrote to Sierra Online to see if they would tell me. I didn't think I would hear anything, but maybe three or four weeks later I received a letter back from [Sierra's] Gano Haine that said, "Geoff, we love your enthusiasm for Sierra and are so excited you are a big fan. You seem to really know our games. We're wondering if you would like to beta test one of our upcoming titles." Again, I was 12 at the time, so I was fascinated and wrote right back. They sent me the discs for EcoQuest 2 for MS DOS dated November 13, 1992. I still have those discs on my desk. I played through that game early and gave them feedback. There was a forum on CompuServe where all of the beta testers around the world would go to chat about what we thought and give feedback to designers. Between my math homework in high school, I was going onto that forum to talk to people like Roberta Williams, Jane Jensen, Al Lowe, and all of these folks that were making adventure games for Sierra.

I got to do that. It was all luck of the draw. I didn't get paid anything. I just got early access to those games. When those titles were actually released, I knew how to get through them early, so [online] I became this sort of master of adventure games. One day, an editor from one of the gaming magazines started noticing all of my posts and thought, "This guy really knows his games, and writes well about them." He sent me an email and asked me if I would like to write for the magazine. I then started previewing games. My path into games was a combination of having early access to them, an editor noticing my work, and being around those creators when I was a teenager. That led to me going to id Software in 1993 when they were finishing up Doom.

You were kind of the Doogie Howser of video games.

Yeah. It's crazy. Doogie Howser or some people compare [my path] to *Almost Famous*. I just kind of fell into it at the time; I didn't need to be making money. I was still going to school. I've never really had any other job in my life. There would be summers where I would just write for video game magazines, or travel to meet with developers. I got to go to the first E3 in 1995 when I was 15 or 16 years old, and had to have a special permission letter from Doug Lowenstein of the ESA saying I could get in because you had to be 18. I got special treatment.

Did you think of anything else for a possible career?

I never saw it as my career or calling. I went to college at USC in L.A., and I was toying with going to law school. I took my LSAT. Games just kind of naturally grew into a career. It was never my plan. Things just happened, and I just got busier and busier. After college, all of the television stuff started with G4 and Spike. All of these opportunities just came up. I deferred law school for two years, and never went back to it.

You've worn many hats in the industry, but I would say your most defined roles where when you were on GameTrailers and G4 TV. How did you realize you could make it in front of the camera?

I didn't have a lot of on-camera experience, but I did do talk shows and stuff like that. Strangely enough, I was also around the first video game awards show called Cybermania '94, which was produced by a friend of my dad and aired on TBS. It was live from Universal Studios and hosted by Leslie Nielsen and Jonathan Taylor Thomas. I got to go to that show, and help write the narrative for the nominee packages that William Shatner read. I got to be around television stuff behind the scenes, and then Victor Lucas of Electric Playground came to me one day at a press event and said, "Hey, I think you might be good in front of a camera. Have you ever thought about hosting some stuff?" I said, "No, but I'd give it a try." I was already at the press events at the time for *Entertainment Weekly*, so I started doing double duty with Electric Playground. That started in probably 2002 or 2003. It grew from there to G4 to Spike.

From your written Final Hours exploration of how games are created to other ventures like the Game Awards and E3 Coliseum, it seems like you are always on the cusp of changing your career focus. Is this just a continuation of the path you've had with opportunities coming to you?

I always say my career has this natural evolution from writing articles to doing video stuff to moving into streaming and digital. I'm grateful that I've been able to move between different mediums. I'm just fascinated by how games are covered in new ways. I've been lucky enough to have the support of game developers and publishers to navigate me to those new places. I don't know what I'll be doing 10 years from now, but I think the Game Awards will always be a part of it.

You decided to create the Game Awards on your own. Walk me through that decision.

It sort of came out of necessity because the Spike award show was sort of going in the wrong way. It took a lot of financial and personal risk to do that five years ago. Making that show has largely taken up the last five years of my life, and I would say I'm focused on it 70 percent of the year. It's such a huge project. I'm happy to do it since it's such a huge opportunity to represent the industry. It's a unique phenomenon working on something like this. You work for a better part of a year on it and it gets boiled down to 120 minutes of time. There are always things you hope would have been better, but I think last year's show was really special. We had big game reveals, the moment with Carol Shaw was really special, and with these shows you can't really engineer them; they just have to sort of happen. Last year worked well and gave me great confidence. We got a great response from the audience, and I think we can push that a little bit further this year. I think you'll see a show that is about awards and game announcements, but also celebrates what it means to play games. We're going to recognize people who are doing great things in the community. I realize our opportunity is much greater than just handing out trophies for games. I want to make sure we celebrate what our industry means to everyone.

The Game Awards returns on December 6

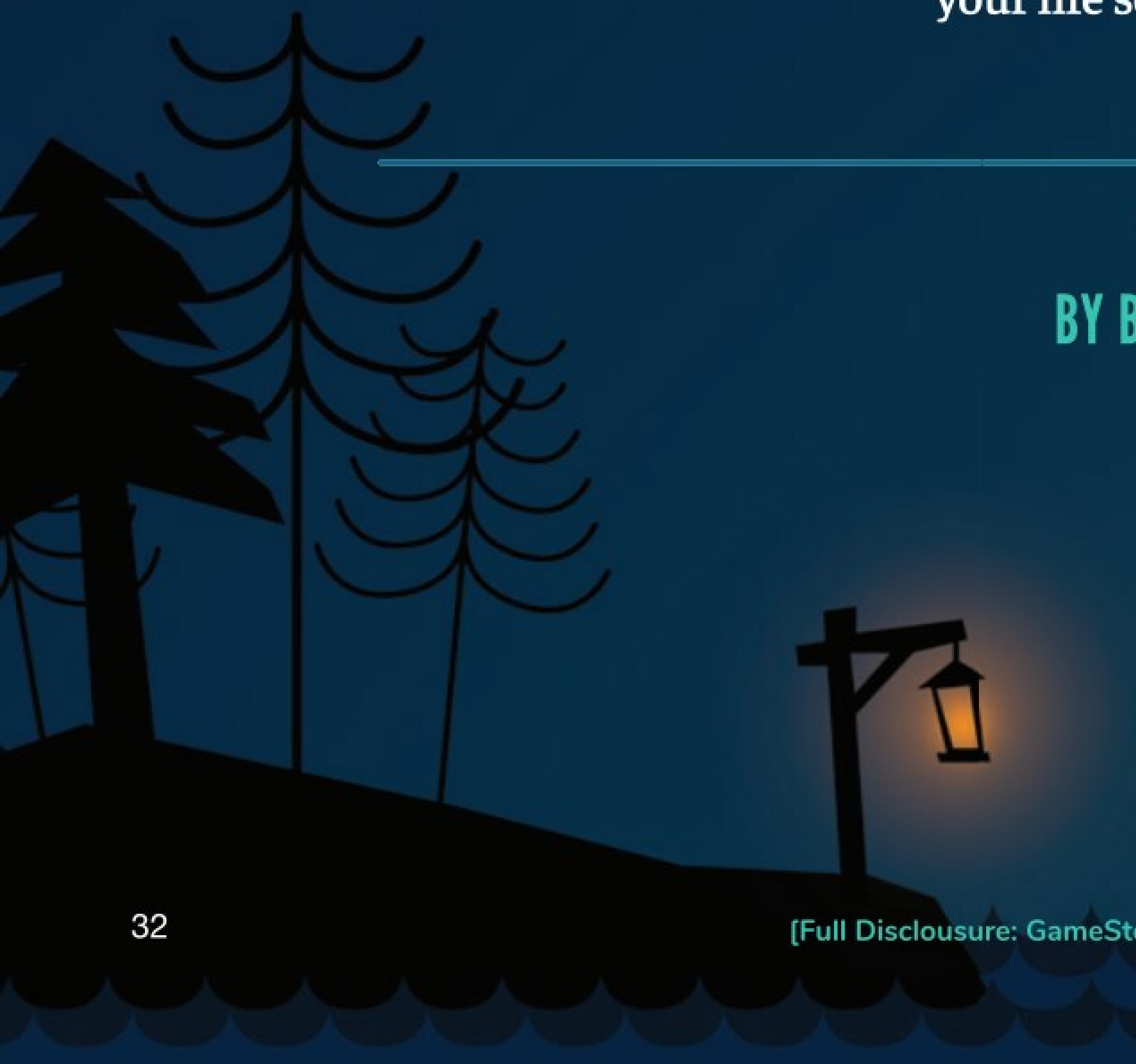
Game Informer's

Holiday Buying Guide

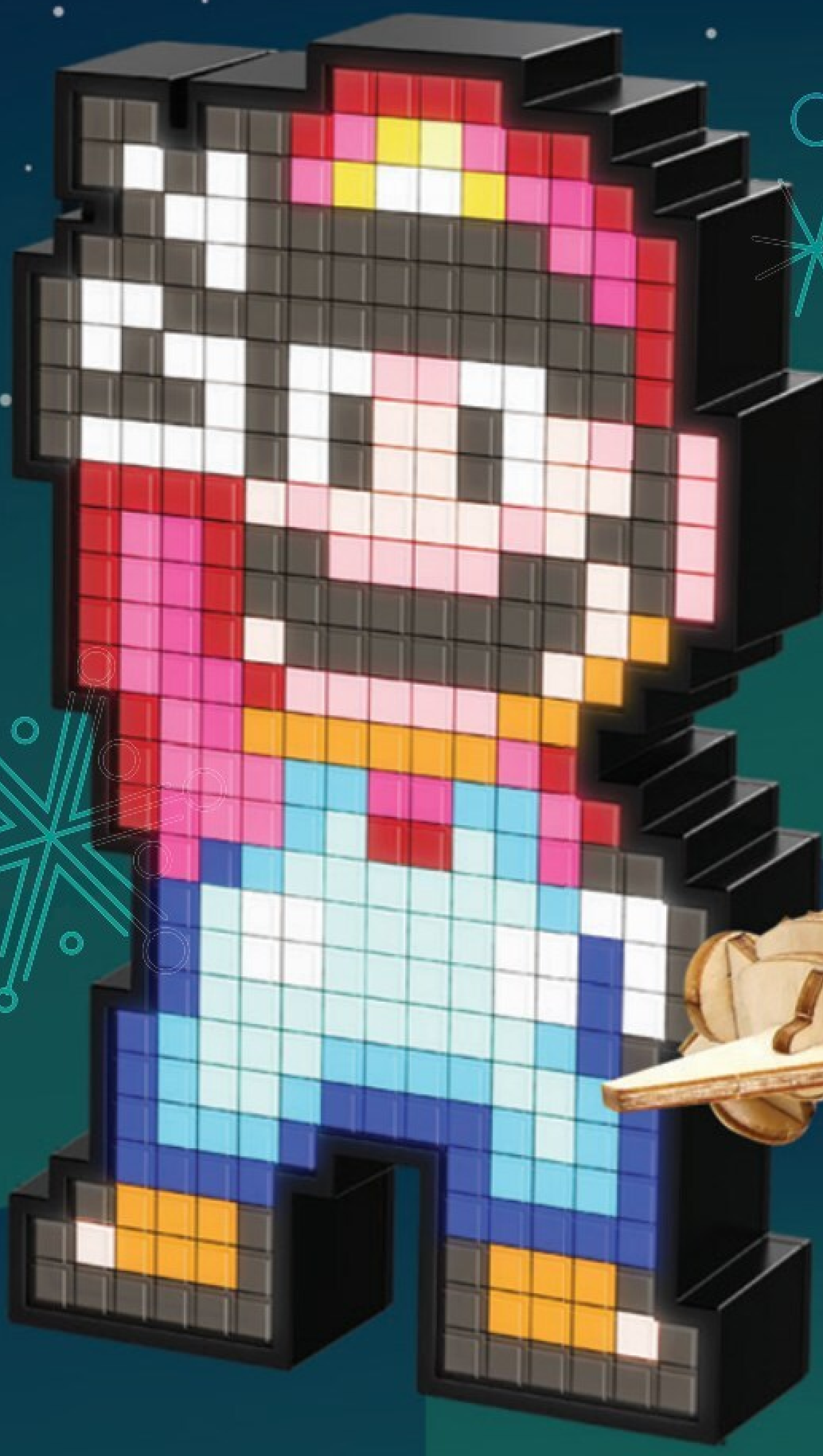
2018

The world is full of cheap toys and chintzy collectibles marketed toward gamers. We're here to help you sort through the junk and give the geeks in your life something they'll actually cherish.

BY BEN REEVES AND MATT MILLER



[Full Disclousure: GameStop is the parent company of both Game Informer and ThinkGeek]



1

2

TOMB RAIDER
TOMB RAIDER II
PlayStation
TOMB RAIDER THE LAST REVELATION
PlayStation

3

4

EMPIRE STATE UNIVERSITY
NEW YORK
1865
SPIDER-MAN

5

1 **Pixel Pals Super Mario World Light** | *$14.99; pdp.com*

2 **Tomb Raider PlayStation 1 Retro Coasters** | *$12.99; geekstore.com*

3 **Overwatch D.Va Incredibuilds Wood Model** | *$22.00; gear.blizzard.com*

4 **Spider-Man Empire State University Shirt** | *$26.00; designbyhumans.com*

5 **Sonos Beam Soundbar** | *$399; sonos.com*

SPOTLIGHT

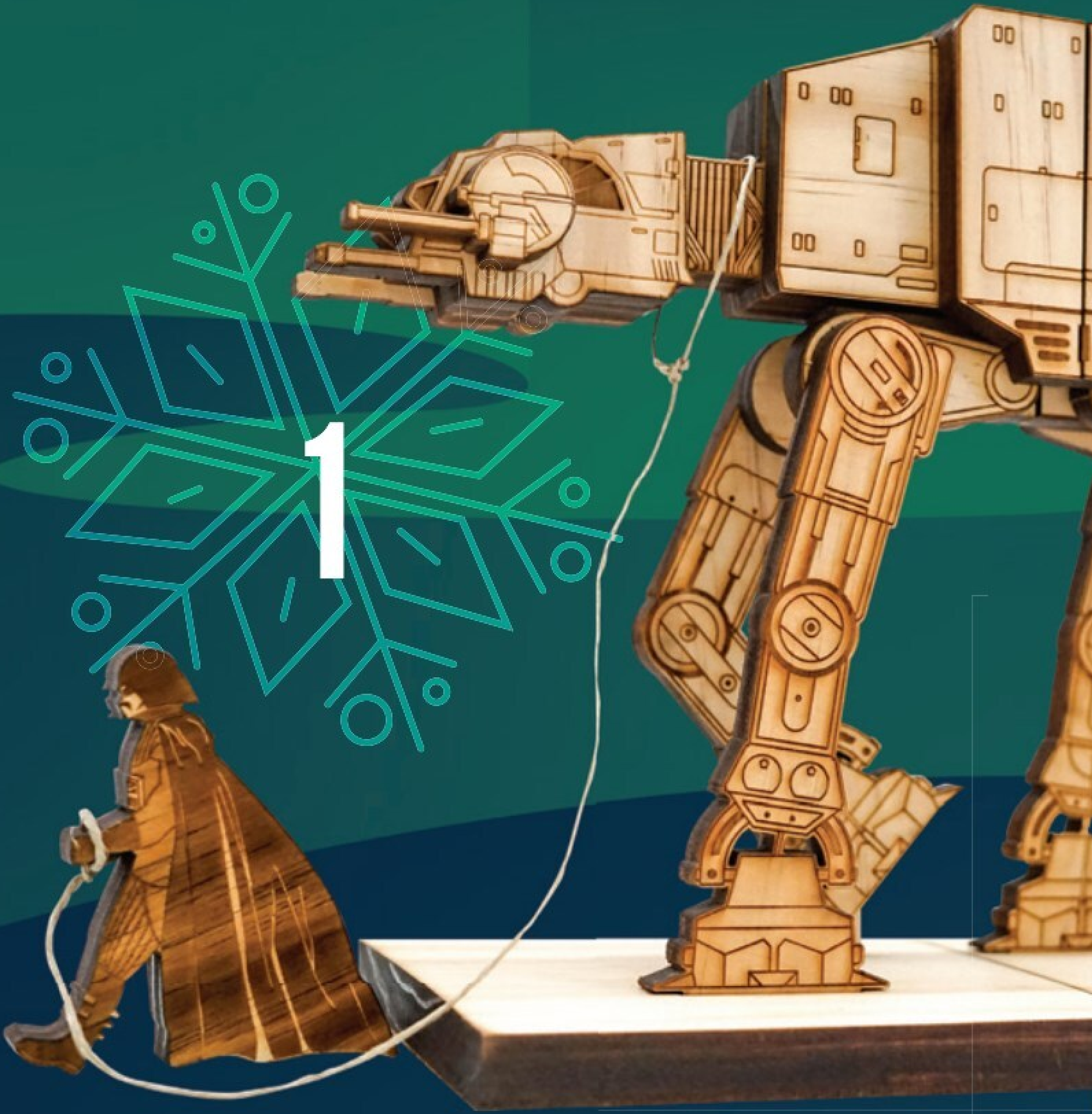
iBUYPOWER Snowblind Pro Gaming PC

The Snowblind doesn't just make games look great, it will make your entire gaming room look better thanks to a 1280x1024 resolution transparent LCD side panel. Using open-source software, users can fully customize this display with any number of designs and downloadable widget skins. The Snowblind's starter build features an Intel Core i7-8700K processor and an Nvidia GeForce GTX 1070 Ti graphics card, which should power through games for years to come.

Starting at $2,049; ibuypower.com

intel
iBUYPOWER

2



1

3

1 **AT-AT On A Leash Book Ends** | $55.00; etsy.com

2 **Legend of Zelda Vintage Rustic Hip Sling Pack** $49.99; entertainmentearth.com

3 **Death Star Fire Pit** | $3,000; westcoastfirepits.com

4 **Transformers Generations Predaking** | $159; shop.hasbro.com

5 **Space Invaders Cabinet T-Shirt** | $19.99; store.na.square-enix-games.com

6 **Xbox Elite Wireless Controller** | $149 (each); xbox.com

7 **PlayStation Classic** | $99.99; playstation.com

4

5

SPACE INVADERS
スペースインベーダー

6

7

SONY
PlayStation

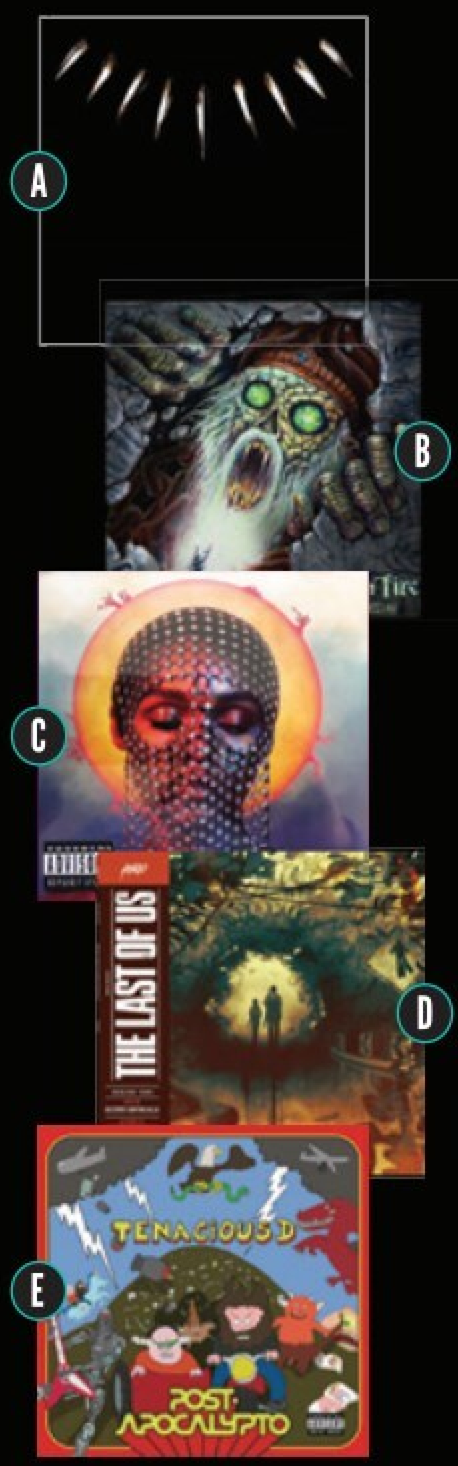
SPOTLIGHT

Destiny Ghost Hunter Shell

These affordable and well-sculpted collectibles are the perfect companions to float beside your TV as your Guardian battles the forces of Darkness. These figures come in multiple color schemes, from the orange and blue Kill Tracker to the bright green Lambda. Each full set includes stand and in-game emblem code.

$14.99; gamestop.com

Music


A
B
C
THE LAST OF US
D
TENACIOUS D
POST-APOCALYPTO
E

A

Black Panther: The Album
$9.49
marvel.com/blackpanther

B

High On Fire – Electric Messiah
$10.00
highonfire.net

C

Janelle Monae – Dirty Computer
$12.99
jmonae.com

D

The Last Of Us: Original Score - Volume One 2XLP
$35.00
mondotees.com

E

Tenacious D – Post-Apocalypto
$13.98
tenaciousd.com

BETRAYAL
LEGACY

SPOTLIGHT

Betrayal Legacy

The classic Betrayal at House on the Hill takes on new dimensions in this legacy board game. You play through the many generations of a family as they return to the same haunted mansion again and again. Over multiple playthroughs, you'll tear up cards, put stickers on tiles, and shape the history of the house, even as a larger narrative slowly creeps forth.

$75.00; avalonhill.wizards.com

1

VANTAGE
VANTAGE

2

SONY
PS4 Pro
1TB
RED DEAD REDEMPTION II

3

NINTENDO
SWITCH

4

1 **Scuf Vantage PS4 Controller** | *$169 (each); scufgaming.com/vantage*

2 **PlayStation 4 Pro 1TB Red Dead Redemption II Bundle** | *$399; gamestop.com*

3 **Pikachu & Eevee Edition Nintendo Switch Bundle** | *$399; gamestop.com*

4 **Lego Remote Controlled Batmobile** | *$99.99; lego.com*

Wrangler®

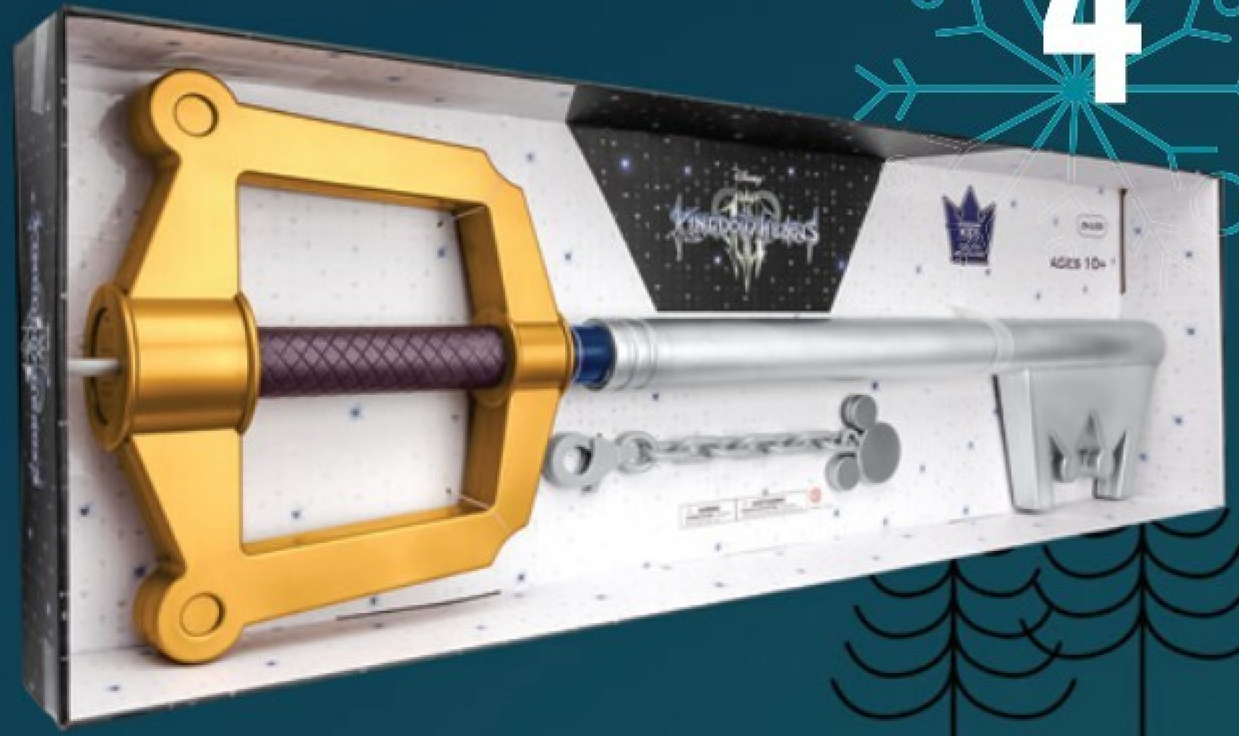
TO FIND NEW STYLES AND GREAT FITS, VISIT WRANGLER.COM

SPOTLIGHT

Star Wars First Order Stormtrooper Robot

Ubtech's voice-activated First Order Stormtrooper is tricked out with accelerometers, infrared sensors, and three microphone arrays that allow this bot to navigate the alien landscape of your living room. Through a companion app, users can play a variety of games, including an AR experience that lets you see through the Stormtrooper's helmet. This tiny bot even recognizes faces, so it knows who's boss. That's the kind of A.I. takeover we can get behind.

$149.99; ubtrobot.com



1 **Psycho Mantis Metal Gear Solid Figure** | *$524; first4figures.com*

2 **LG 38-inch UltraWide Curved LED Monitor** | *$1,399; lg.com/us*

3 **Kraken Metal Dice Set** | *$49.99; krakendice.com*

4 **Kingdom Hearts: Kingdom Key Replica Keyblade** | *$66.99; merchoid.com*

5 **Vizio SmartCast P-Series P-E1 65-inch TV** | *$1,299; vizio.com*

6 **Pokémon Gallery Figure DX: Charizard-Blast Burn**
$28.99; pokemoncenter.com

7 **Philips Hue Smart Home Ambiance Lighting** | *Starting at $39.99; meethue.com*

SPOTLIGHT

Nvidia GeForce RTX 2080 TI Graphics Card

There are a lot of affordable video cards on the market right now that deliver great performance, but if you want the best of the best (for a price) then Nvidia's RTX 2080 TI will turn your game machine into an unstoppable powerhouse. Not only does Nvidia's new card offer 4K gaming at 60fps, but it is capable of real-time ray tracing, which allows game developers to create cinematic quality lighting effects and more life-like reflections. In other words, it makes good games look great.

$1,199; nvidia.com

PHILIPS
hue
White and color ambiance
Single A19 bulb
Une lampe A19
PHILIPS
Hue white and color
7

Books

Fallout
A
THE FERAL DETECTIVE
JONATHAN LETHEM
B
FINAL FANTASY
C
I MIGHT REGRET THIS
ABBI JACOBSON
D
BRANDON SANDERSON
LEGION
E
R.A. SALVATORE
TIMELESS
F

A

Fallout: The Vault Dweller's Official Cookbook
$35.00
gear.bethesda.net

B

***The Feral Detective* by Jonathan Lethem**
$26.99
jonathanlethem.com

C

Final Fantasy Ultimania Archive Volume 1
$39.99
darkhorse.com

D

***I Might Regret This* by Abbi Jacobson**
$28.00
hachettebookgroup.com

E

***Legion: The Many Lives of Stephen Leeds* by Brandon Sanderson**
$27.99
brandonsanderson.com

F

***Timeless: A Drizzt Novel* by R.A. Salvatore**
$27.99
harpercollins.com

SPOTLIGHT

MSI GS65 Stealth Thin Gaming Laptop

A lot of gaming laptops test the definition of portable, but MSI's newest 15.6-inch gaming laptop is comfortable to carry but powerful enough to run many modern games thanks to Intel's 8th Generation 6-Core processors and VR Ready graphics cards like Nvidia's GeForce GTX 1070. A smart gold and black design, ultra-thin bezel, and 15.3-inch 144hz display makes this a great looking laptop from any angle.

Starting at $1,779; us.msi.com

1

3

2

4

1 **One61 Batman Smartwatch** | *$125; one61.com*

2 **Azio MGK Armato Retro Gaming Keyboard** | *$129; aziocorp.com*

3 **Final Fantasy Silver Moogle Pendant** | *$119; store.na.square-enix-games.com*

4 **Vintage OjO Smart Electric Scooter** | *$2,399; ojoelectric.com/shop*

CYBER MONDAY SALE

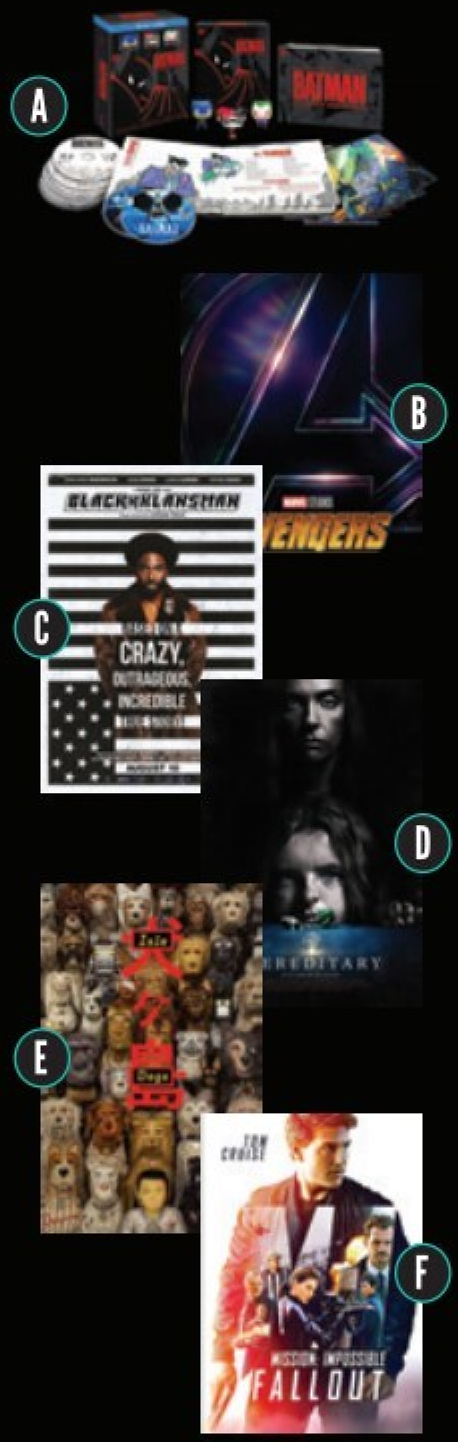
Like Santa’s workshop, the deals don’t stop after Black Friday.

Keep shopping the best deals in gaming on November 26th at your local GameStop, GameStop.com or with the GameStop app.

Plus, free shipping on qualifying orders.

GameStop®
JOY TO THE PLAYERS

Movies



A
Batman: The Complete Animated Series Deluxe
$112
wbshop.com

B
Avengers: Infinity War
$19.99
marvel.com/avengers

C
BlacKkKlansman
$14.99
focusfeatures.com/blackkklansman

D
Hereditary
$14.99
hereditary.movie

E
Isle of Dogs
$14.99
isleofdogsmovie.com

F
Mission: Impossible – Fallout
$19.99
missionimpossible.com

1

2

3

KEYFORGE
CALL OF THE ARCHONS
RICHARD GARFIELD

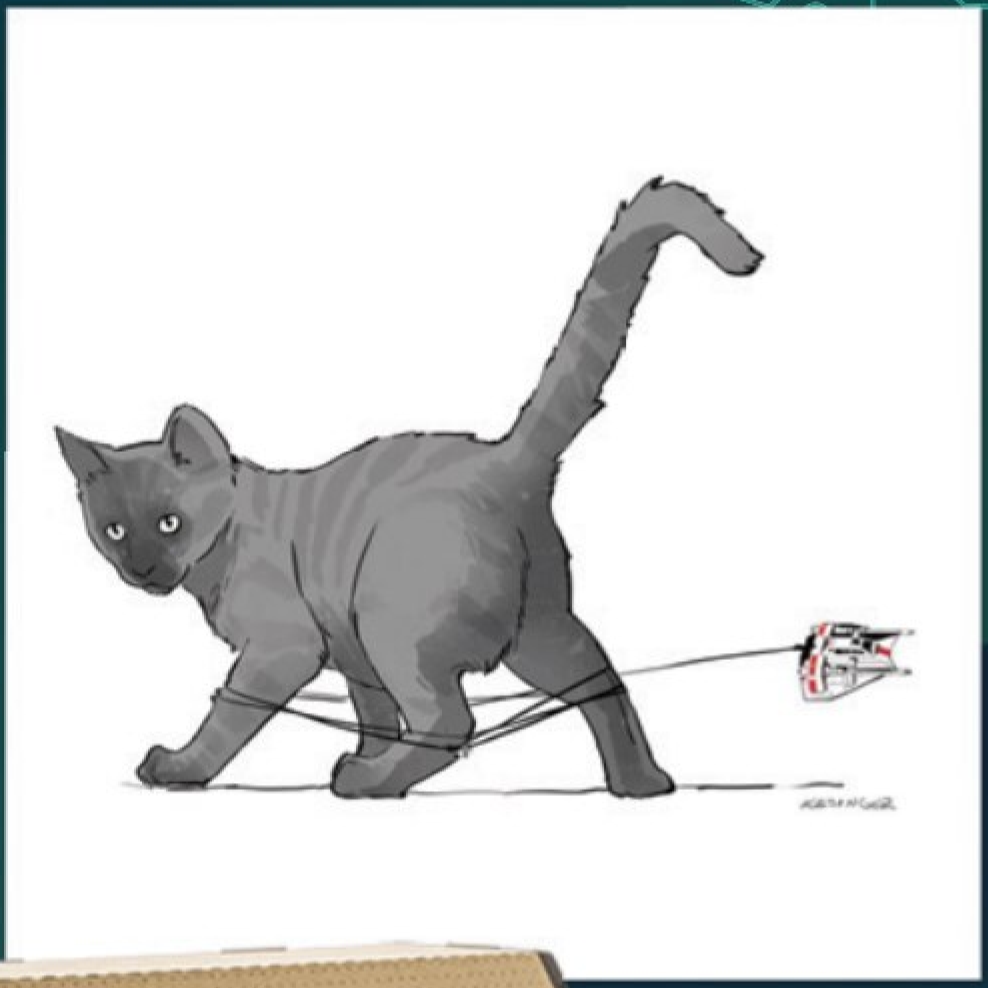
SPOTLIGHT

Keyforge: Call Of The Archons

This new twist on dueling card games from Magic: The Gathering creator Richard Garfield doesn't feature collectible booster packs. Instead, every pack is one-of-a-kind and filled with cards meant to be used together. Your cards are ready to play without any deckbuilding or trading, challenging you to find the synergies and combos inherent to your unique set.

$35.95; fantasyflightgames.com

4



SPOTLIGHT

Evo App-Connected Coding Robot

In the future, kids won't simply need to talk to robots, they'll need to know how to hack them. Evo is an adorable little droid that can be programed to create music, respond to your gestures, and interact with other robots to play games. Evo's simple drag-and-drop software also teaches kids how to program.

$99.99 (each); ozobot.com

5

7

6

1 **Fallout Plasma Rifle Replica** | *$119; thinkgeek.com*

2 **Neo Geo Mini Arcade** | *$109; snk-corp.co.jp/us/neogeomini*

3 **Jurassic World T. Rex Woodgrain Watch** | *$34.99; thinkgeek.com*

4 **CAT-AT Art Print** | *$20.00; etsy.com*

5 **Nyko Switch Arcade Cardboard** | *$19.99; nyko.com*

6 **PowerCore 20100 Nintendo Switch Battery Charger** | *$89.99; anker.com/store*

7 **Breville Oracle Touch Fully Automatic Espresso Machine** | *$2,499; sageoracletouch.com* ◆

SPIDER-MAN

Spider-Man from Insomniac Games has already become the best and most successful dedicated video game the character has ever experienced. It is currently Sony's fastest-selling title ever, and we spoke with creative director Bryan Intihar and lead writer Jon Paquette about how it came together and how it changed during development.

by Ben Hanson

Did you have any reception expectations on your end for release?
Paquette: No, we talked about it in the halls. And we were curious, but you never know with these kinds of things. We've worked on games where it didn't sell nearly as much as we thought it should, so we try not to get too excited about It.

Intihar: Yeah, I think for us – obviously we knew being Spider-Man it would be a big deal. I don't think we understood the phenomenon that it would be. Like, it kind of started sinking in when Photo mode happened.

You have said you had to be more flexible on this project than you've had to be on any project in the past. Why were so many things thrown out? Why were you guys rearranging so many things for this game?
I: I think part of it is that we'd never made a Spider-Man game before so it's just the learning process of who the character is. I mean, obviously we were all fans, but being a fan of something and then making something based on it are two different things, right? And when you think you know how the character works in a situation or what he should sound like, you don't know it 'till you know it, unfortunately and fortunately. And I think that we did want to get it right and sometimes at the end of the day, you just don't know if it's going to work until it's actually in the game.

The spider riding along with MJ and eventually making its way to Miles. Was that always the plan for that sequence?
I: [laughs] It was really different in the beginning. It was really weird. Oh God, it wasn't even – I can't believe I'm even going to say this. I've never told anybody this story, ever. He originally wasn't going to get bit by the spider. It was going to be a combination of Peter's blood and Mr. Negative grabbing him.

P: Well, first it was just Peter's blood, and he was already cut. And then Peter's blood got into him.

I: Originally, what was going to happen was – I can't believe I've never told this story yet. World exclusive – I know you guys like world exclusives. Originally what happened was, you were going to take down Mr. Negative and then Pete was going to be so injured that Miles was actually going to carry him back to F.E.A.S.T. Miles was going to start developing his spider power as he started to walk Pete back and he actually took Pete's web shooters and started doing web stuff. But, the fiction was all over the place. We had, like, 45 people in the scene.

P: I remember that! It was so big that the big end battle was like, "Why is Miles showing up here? I don't know but it's cool if we get him there."

I: It was one of those things that just didn't make it.

Is this a totally self-contained game? Obviously there's the joke about the Avengers being on the West Coast.
I: You have to ask Marvel – I'm sure you want to ask about the Marvel gaming universe. The thing is we could not make the game at this point thinking about the larger universe. I said this early on, even before Jon was probably on this project, I was having really early discussions with Mike and Bill – Mike Jones the executive producer and vice president of Marvel Games and Bill Rosemann who's the executive creative director – they were new to Marvel. I mean, Bill had been at Marvel for a long time, but he had never been on the gaming side and Mike had been a game developer for a while and moved to Marvel and when they were hired, that was a new group and we kind of talked about it.

They wanted to make big console games and we talked about, "We gotta' get the *Iron Man*," and what I mean by "the *Iron Man*," I don't mean like start off a universe. It's the start of the Marvel experience that you expect from a console game. So it was about establishing a very high-quality experience from a Marvel game. It wasn't about the start of a Marvel game universe, it was about the quality bar that we all expected from those games.

Were you ever close to spoiling anything prior to release?
I: Every E3, I was absolutely petrified of bringing the word Otto up. Literally, about the fact that he was in the game. Especially, when we revealed the sinister six. Because I would say, "Rhino, Scorpion, Electro…" and I worried I would somehow say "Ock" by mistake. So, I would be petrified that Otto would get spoiled, not just by anybody – but by me! ◆

December2018

GAME RELEASES

Tuesday 04
- Just Cause 4 (PS4, Xbox One, PC)
- Monster Boy and the Cursed Kingdom (PS4, Xbox One, Switch, PC)
- Mutant Year Zero: Road to Eden (PS4, Xbox One, PC)
- Override: Mech City Brawl (PS4, Xbox One, PC)
- Persona 3: Dancing in Moonlight (PS4, Vita)
- Persona 4: Dancing All Night (PS4)
- Persona 5: Dancing in Starlight (PS4, Vita)

Friday 07
- Katamari Damacy (Switch, PC)
- Super Smash Bros. Ultimate (Switch) ①

Tuesday 11
- Earth Defense Force 5 (PS4)

Wednesday 12
- Insurgency: Sandstorm (PC)

Thursday 13
- Dragon Marked for Death (Switch)

MOVIE & TV PREMIERES

Sunday 02
- Nightflyers (Syfy)

Friday 14
- Mortal Engines (theaters)
- Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse (theaters)
- Vice (theaters)

Friday 21
- Aquaman (theaters) ②
- Bumblebee (theaters)
- Diaberlo (Netflix)
- Holmes & Watson (theaters)
- Mary Poppins Returns (theaters)
- Runaways (Hulu)

Sunday 30
- The Orville (Fox)

GAMER CULTURE

Saturday 01

Spider-Man

If you played through Insomniac Games' Spider-Man and want to know more about key players in this story, now is a great time to check out two new Marvel series. Super Spider-Man and Miles Morales: Spider-Man both launch this month.

Tuesday 04

Counter-Strike ESL Pro League Season 8 Finals ③

Held in Odense, Denmark, the 16 best Counter-Strike teams in the world are battling it out to take home the trophy and the lion's share of a $1 million prize pool. The tournament runs for three days and will broadcast on most streaming channels.

Thursday 06

The Game Awards

The best games of the year will be recognized at the annual Game Awards show, airing live tonight. This show also veers away from the awards to show new game trailers and musical performances. Which game will come out on top this year? God of War set a high bar early, but Spider-Man tore up summer, and you can't count out Red Dead Redemption II.

Tuesday 18

Season's Beatings

Marvel's greatest heroes unite to save the holiday season in this lengthy 40-page story by writer Jason Latour. With Deadpool leading the charge, you know things won't go according to plan for the other heroes in the first issue of Season's Beatings. ◈

③
ESL
PRO LEAGUE
CS GO

» PLATFORM
PC • Mac

» STYLE
1-Player Strategy
(24-Player Online)

» PUBLISHER
Blizzard
Entertainment

» DEVELOPER
Blizzard
Entertainment

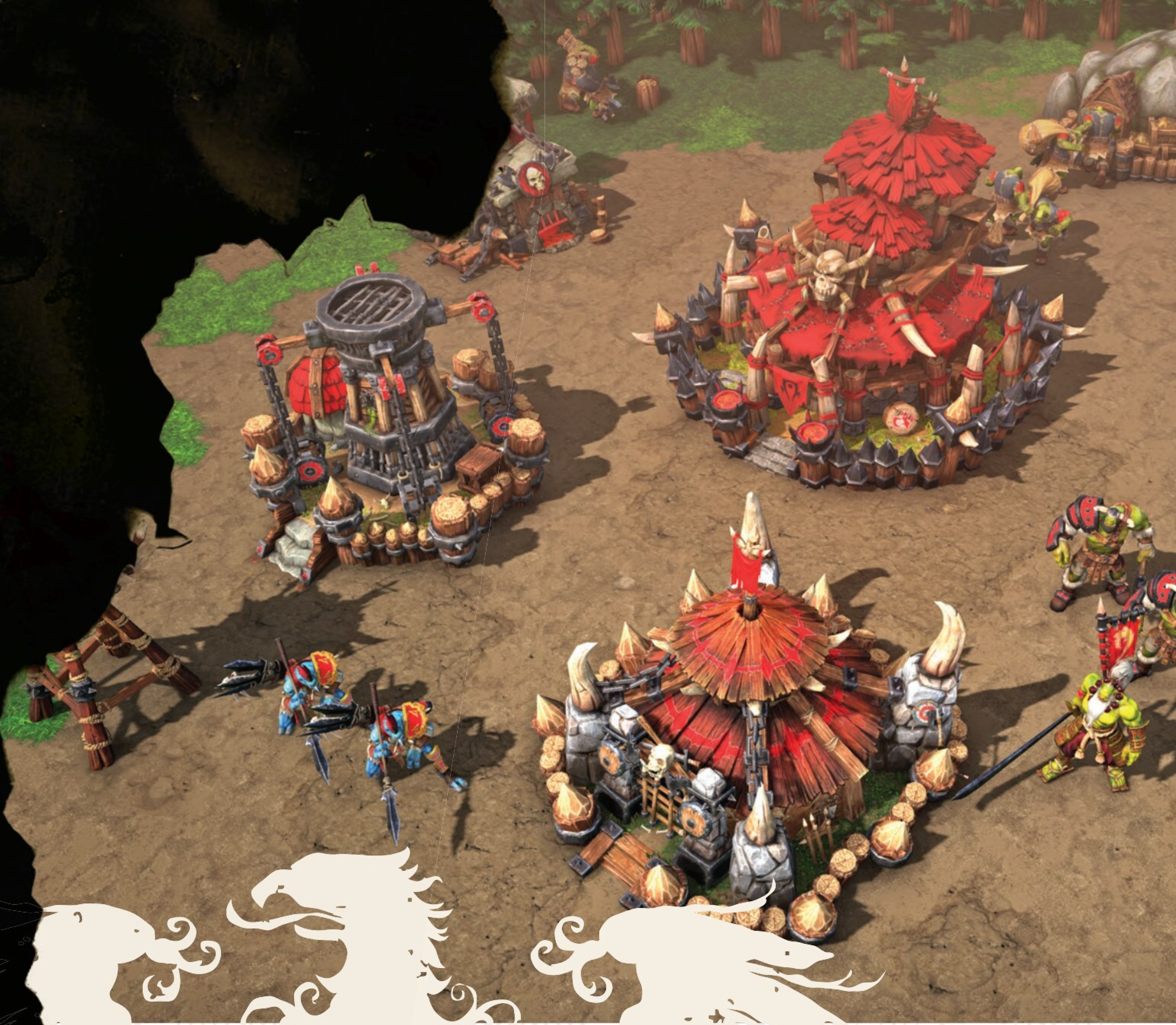
» RELEASE
2019

EF I

E L-TI E ST TE Y

Blizzard looks to the future to rebuild its RTS past with WARCRAFT III: REFORGED

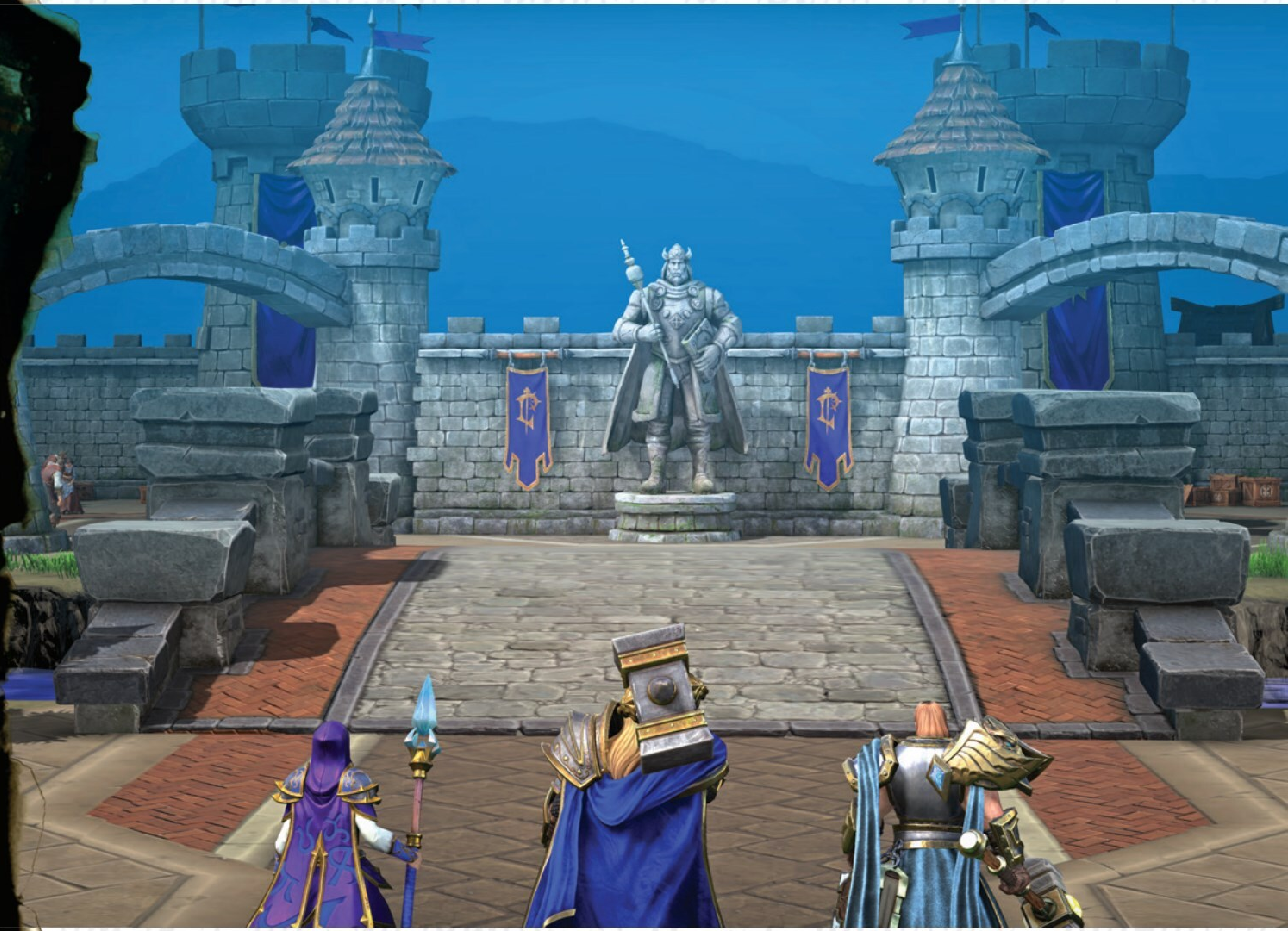
BY
DANIEL TACK

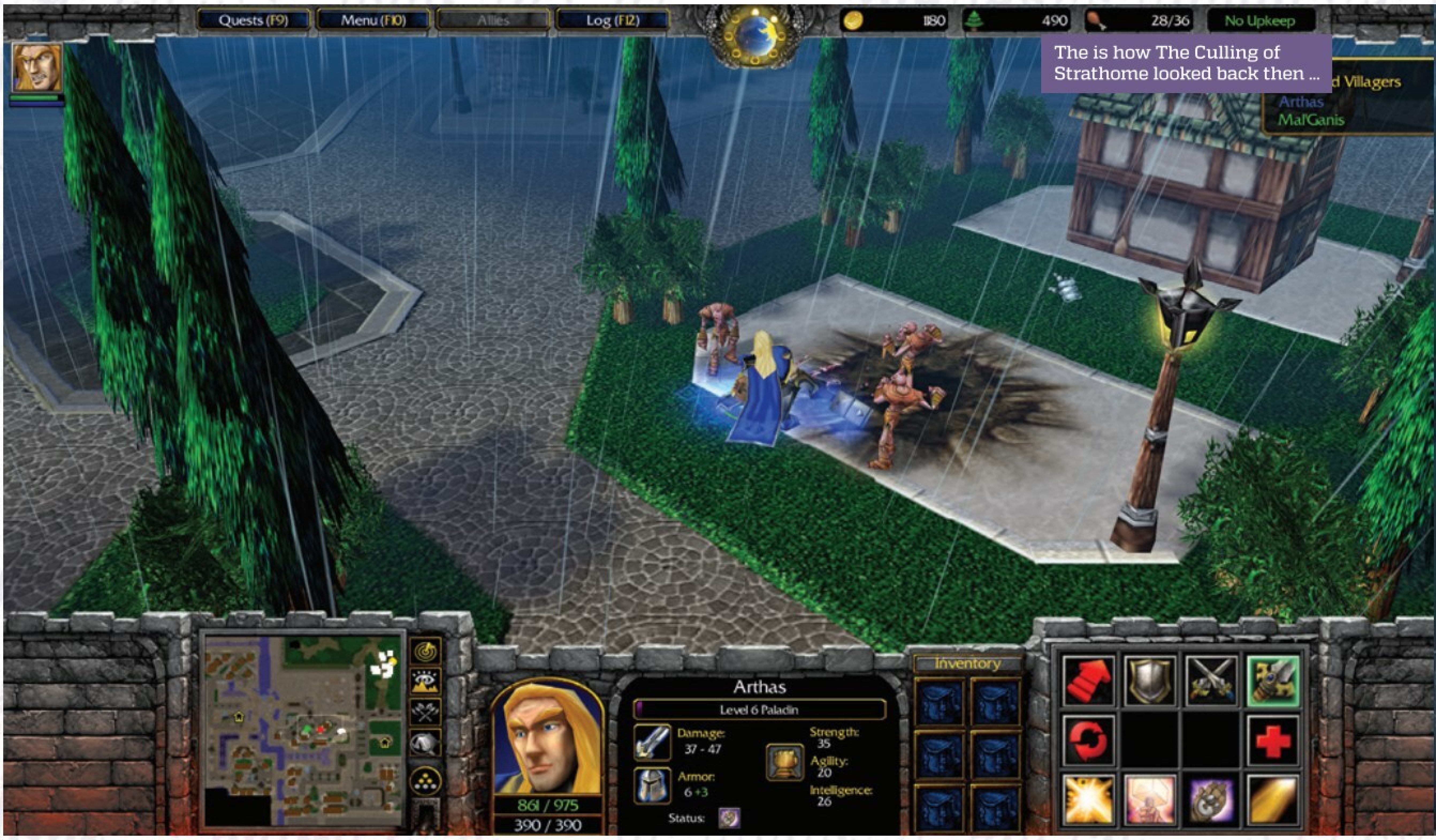


Warcraft III released to critical acclaim and was the fastest-selling PC game of all time when it launched in 2002, inspiring wave upon wave of real-time strategy games after it. Now Warcraft III: Reforged is being rebuilt from the ground up, with new graphics, dialogue, cutscenes, voiceovers, and more.

Unlike StarCraft Remastered, Reforged is less of a remaster and more of a remake, an effort to keep the powerful, lauded core intact

while expanding and exploring. The classic-games team at Blizzard Entertainment wants to keep things familiar for long-time fans while also trying to usher in a whole new generation with new multiplayer options alongside a grand vision to reinvent the classic campaign. The tale of Arthas, Jaina, Sylvanas, and many of Warcraft's most iconic characters begins here, with threads that are far from finished. With this renovation, Blizzard completes a fascinating ouroboros – the DNA from modern-day World of Warcraft feeds back into Warcraft III, where the groundwork for the biggest MMORPG ever began. We traveled to Blizzard Entertainment in Irvine, Calif., to see exactly what's changing in this ambitious rework. In a true gaming-industry rarity, many of the same people that worked on the original game more than 15 years ago are still in place to create this new vision.




Quests (F9)
Menu (F10)
Allies
Log (F12)
1180
490
28/36
No Upkeep
d Villagers
Arthas
Mal'Ganis
Inventory
Arthas
Level 6 Paladin
Damage:
37 - 47
Armor:
6 +3
Strength:
35
Agility:
20
Intelligence:
26
Status:
861 / 975
390 / 390

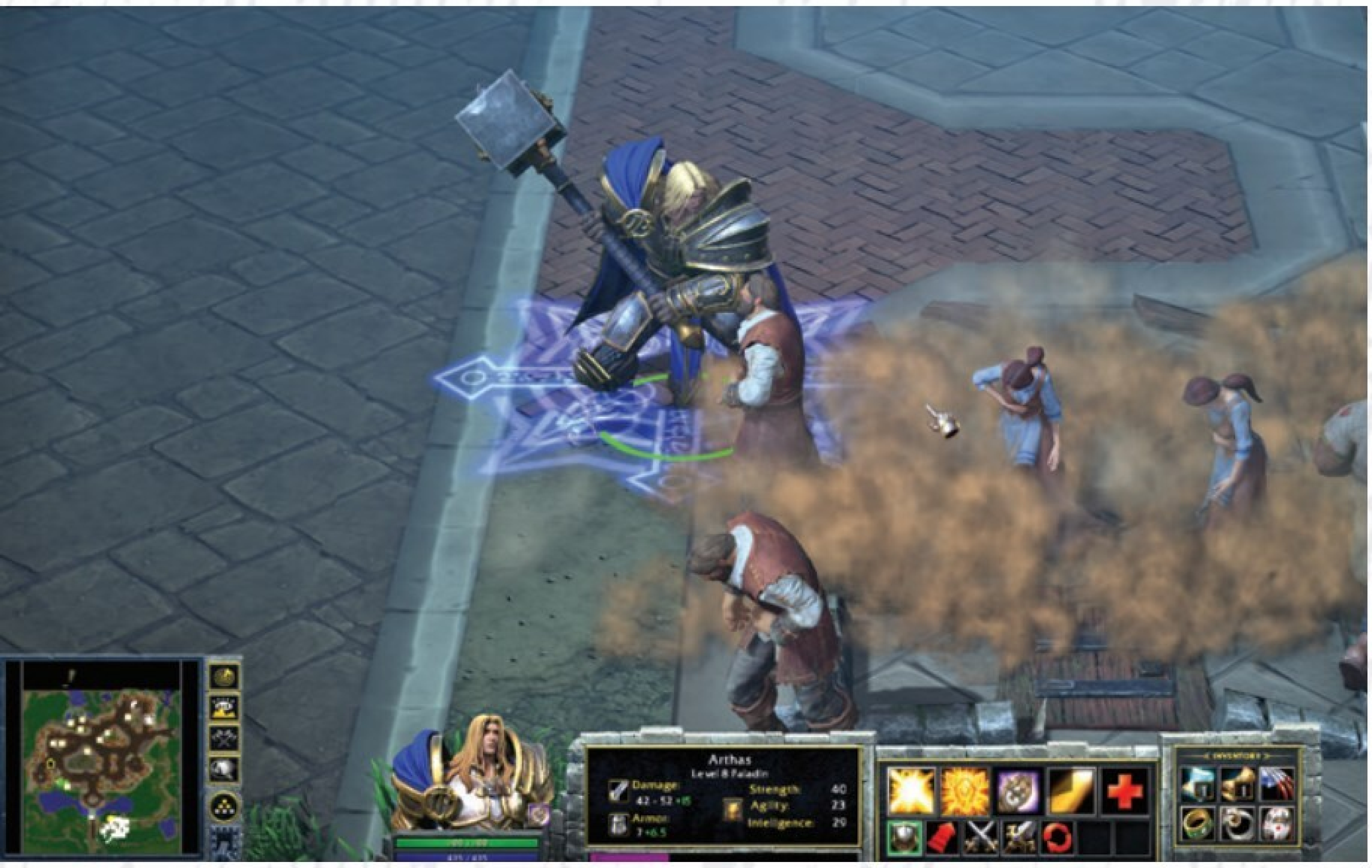
The is how The Culling of Strathome looked back then …

REINVENTING THE PAST

Looking at Warcraft lore today, it's astounding to think that most of the heroes, villains, races, and world that we recognize today started in Warcraft III. The seemingly endless characters, betrayals, and alliances developing from map to map via snippets of dialogue and offscreen assumptions form the backbone of worldbuilding that spiraled off into World of Warcraft and beyond. Warcraft III: Reforged is an opportunity to revisit these characters' origins and give them a bit more background to who they are today, and how they got there.

Warcraft III: Reforged is still deep in development and won't be ready until next year, but we get our first taste during hands-on with an early build of the game, featuring the Alliance Campaign's mission The Culling. The Culling of Stratholme is the beginning of the ultimate fall-from-grace for Arthas Menethil, the righteous holier-than-thou prince of the Alliance, who decides that the city must be purged before the inhabitants become undead monsters.

Slaughtering your own plagued people was controversial stuff even back in 2002, and the story took a dark turn from this point out, a spiral of death and destruction that has echoed and rippled for the past 15 years of Warcraft lore, creating, empowering, and defining key players in Battle for Azeroth (the latest WoW expansion) and beyond.



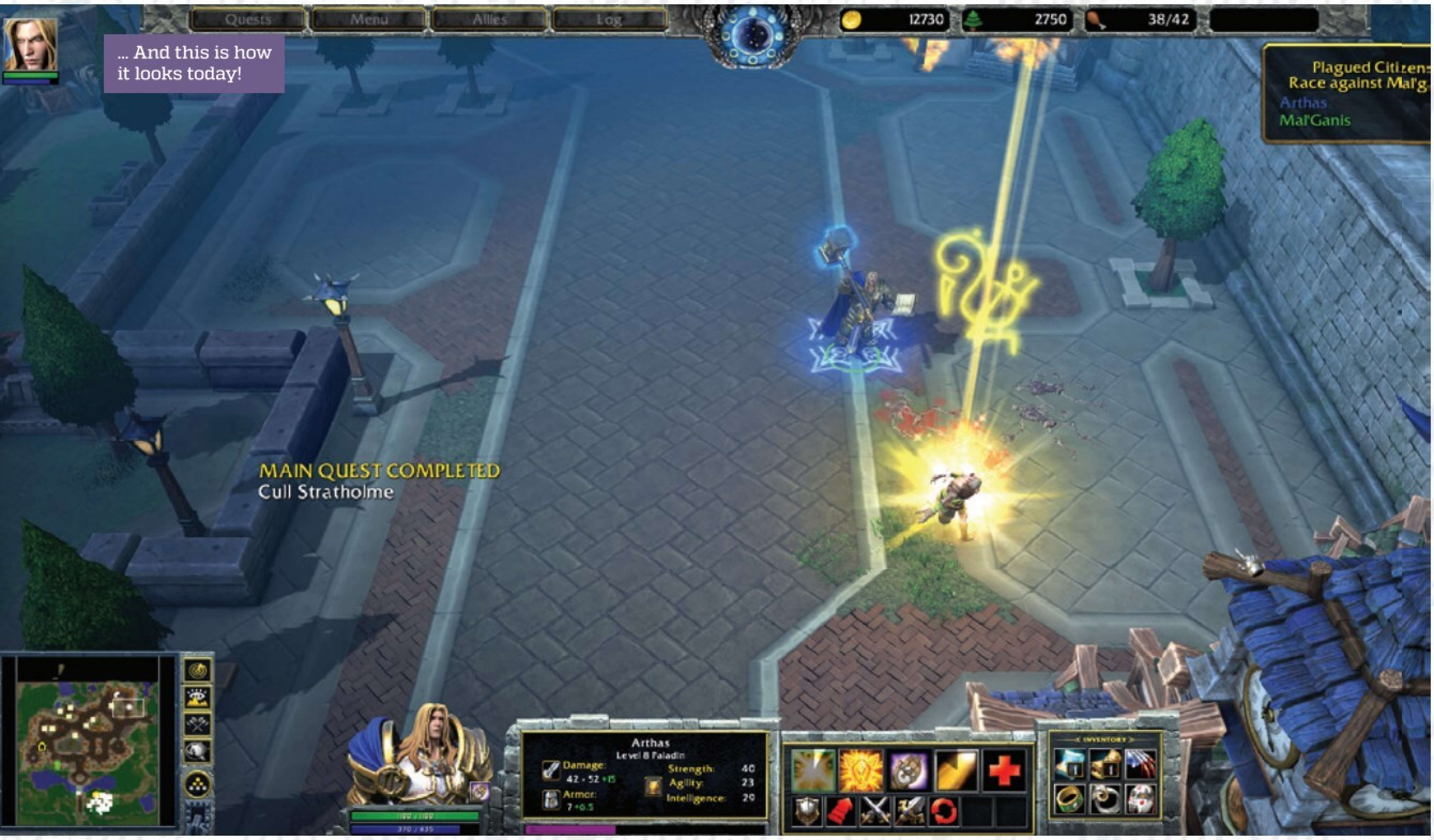
The original map was interesting enough – a lengthy race against the enemy Dreadlord Mal'Ganis to destroy the ghoulish threat. Our hands-on confirmed the spirit of the original task is kept intact, making it recognizable for those familiar with the map, but much has changed.

First and foremost, the graphics and animation have received serious upgrades. If you've played Warcraft III before, your memories paint a far more pleasant picture of how things look compared to actually booting it up. What would look like pedestrian pockets of pixels by today's standards from the original title are now fully fleshed-out entities. Zombies now look like shambling undead fiends instead of a drab blob of color and come in multiple versions, including a new female zombie. Down to the details, these models come complete with fantastic new animations, like eyes rolling out of sockets on our undead friends. Looking at the new models and animations side by side with the old ones, the difference is stark.

"These games are part of your memory. We want to show you what the game in your memory really looked like," says classic-games executive producer Robert Bridenbecker. "It's the memory that you have of that experience that we want to make sure today is upheld."

The once-blocky UI now has some curvature, although Blizzard wants to make sure you can play with the old one if you like. Even with the bold new graphics, the animations remain true to their old frame-count masters, so if you perfected the timing on a hammer swing or a flame cast, those remain tied to their original incarnations.

continued on page 54



... And this is how it looks today!

A HISTORY

ENTER
WARCRAFT III
BLIZZARD

The early days of Blizzard were defined by scrappy, multi-hat-wearing teams. The members were mostly just out of high school, spending their nights playing Dungeons & Dragons. Blizzard chief of staff Shane Dabiri was one of the first customer-service people at the company, who landed the job based on feedback from beta testing the original Warcraft. Executive producer Robert Bridenbecker met Blizzard founder Allen Adham cracking Magic: The Gathering cards. Blizzard's current upper echelons are filled with incredible success stories of folks who started off with an ephemeral moment that led to answering phones and helping customers.

Warcraft III was created by a team that numbered under 30 people. Disciplines and skills weren't tossed into neat baskets like the industry pipelines of today. Conversations and whiteboards took the place of Agile methodology, and often members of the team would be tasked on multiple, sometimes incredibly disparate, projects. Extreme company flexibility could and would move people into whatever was needed at the time. For instance, after the launch of the Warcraft III expansion, producer Chris Sigaty moved to work on the World of Warcraft website – with zero prior experience in websites, simply because that's where they needed someone. "There was never a role," says senior art director Sam Didier. "We had guys that could concept, model, texture, animate... everything. Everyone worked on everything." This extended to things like character voices, barks (when the unit says something after clicking on it), and "pissed" effects (when the unit says something after being repeatedly clicked, usually humorous).

Warcraft III began as something completely different, with roots in two different Blizzard titles that never saw the light of day – the Thrall-centric point-and-click game Warcraft Adventures: Lord of the Clans, and Warcraft Legends.

OF HEROES

Sam Didier, senior art director

"One of the main reasons we pulled back on doing Warcraft Adventures, I don't think we had found the fun of the gameplay yet, and other games were coming out and doing that and then some," Didier says. "By the time we were gonna come out it just felt like it might have been kinda dated. The nice thing is though, much like Ghost (Nova made it to StarCraft 2 after Ghost's cancellation), we were able to bring the character over."

The hero focus and 3D RTS roots of Warcraft III came from Legends. Legends featured no base-building, no fog of war, and an unwieldy over-the-shoulder camera view from the hero's perspective. Many elements of Legends were scrapped, but the hero focus stayed in transition to Warcraft III – an infusion of hefty RPG elements into the real-time strategy genre.

"In Warcraft I and II, the majority of the personality of these characters came from a portrait, because their faces were so small, and their sound," Didier says. "Warcraft III was the game where our characters were a little bit bigger. You could zoom in and out, you could do more than 4-5 frames of animation per direction, and bring out humor and fun."

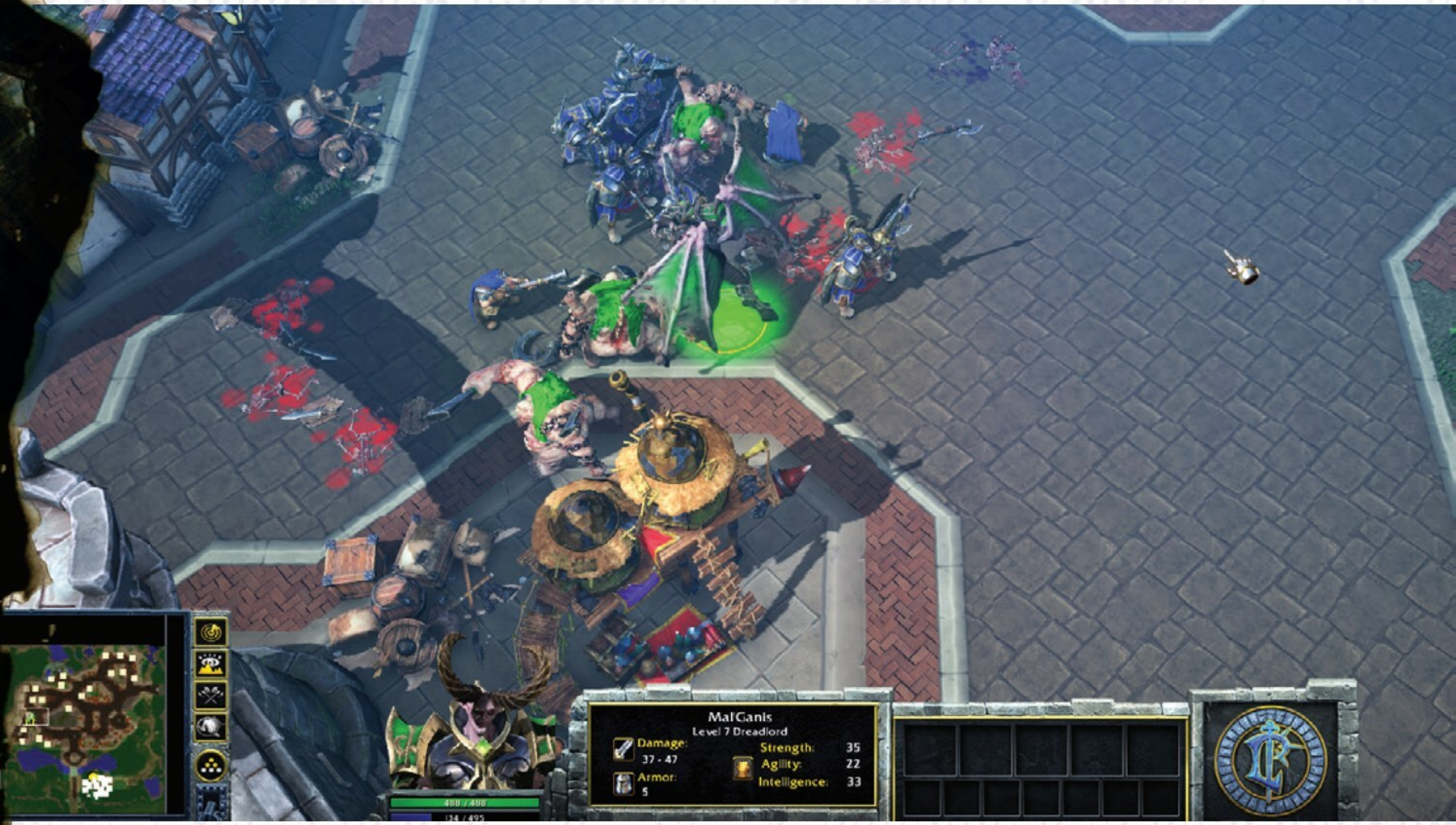
Mike Morhaime, co-founder of Blizzard Entertainment

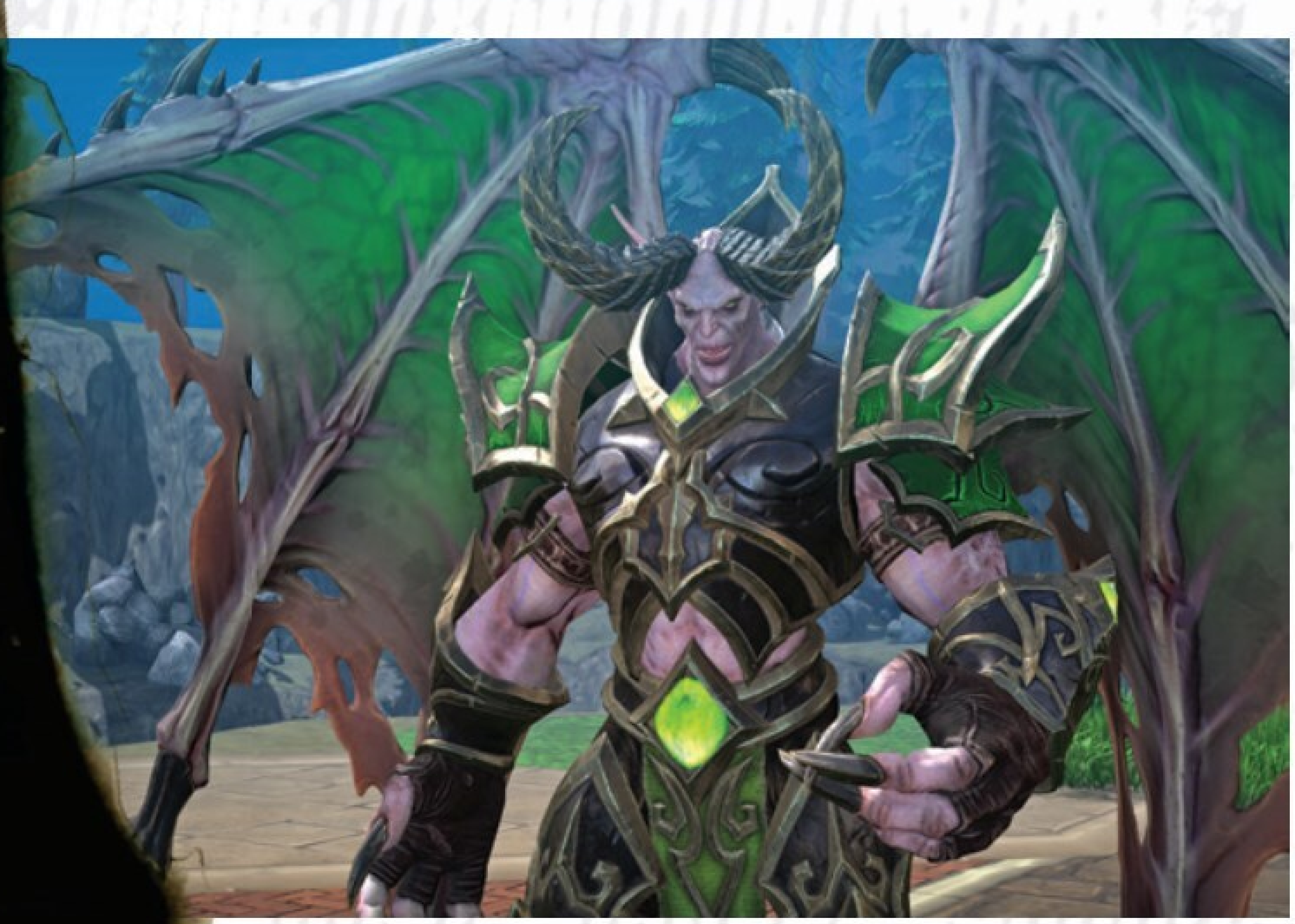
Classic fantasy elements abound in Warcraft III, but with a Blizzard touch. The undead are more frost-based than the usual skeleton throngs. Orcs were more spiritual and shamanistic, with the grunts being big-booted, giant-shoulder-padded brutes and the leadership being a bit more upright and "evolved." "I remember trying to sell Night Elves to people," Didier says. "So check this out, we have elves in our game, right? Seven to eight feet tall. Purple. Blue hair. Worship the moon. Hunt animals. Kind of primitive. Eat meat. And the female characters are the main hunters, and the guys are sort of the wizards and they just sleep all the time – but you know elves are supposed to be short and sylvan!"

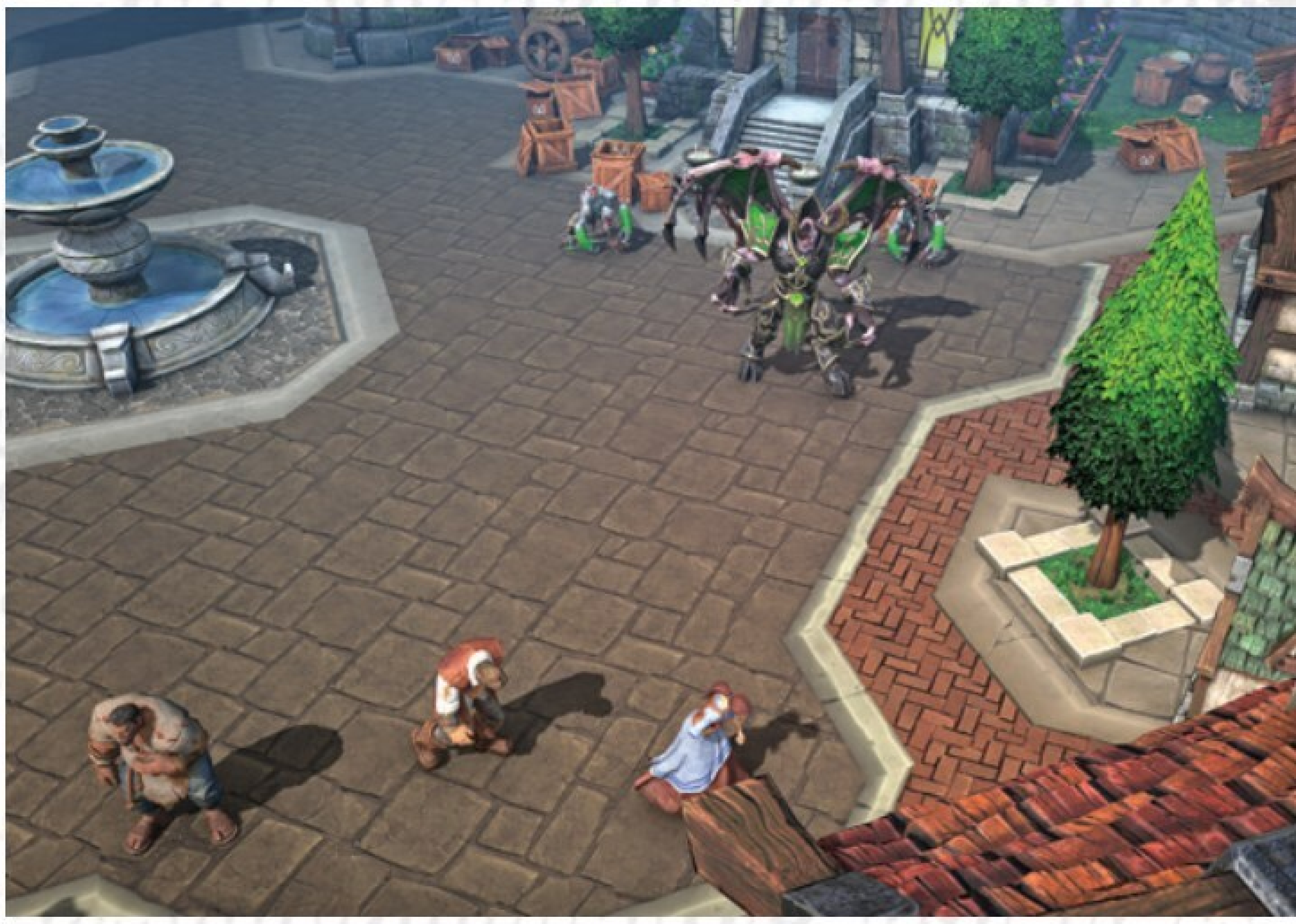
A heavy internal discussion centered around whether or not the game needed navies, oil, and water combat. Warcraft II featured these units and mechanics, and the question was whether the team had to keep building on what was already there. The team went all-in on heroes, along with the concept of a mini-RPG merging with the traditional economy-driven RTS.

Where StarCraft and, to some extent, the other Warcraft games were about mass base management and mass unit management, Warcraft 3 was about "stack centric" (an internal Blizzard term) hero play. While there was still room for micromanagement, the combination of hero levels, abilities, items, and creep camps brought in new gameplay elements that rewarded smaller, more intimate groups of units and their interactions. In some ways, the economy and unit focus of the then-popular RTS model was simplified, but made more diverse and complex by hero development and builds. The spotlight on smaller groups was amplified by the upkeep system, which penalizes players in terms of resource gain the larger their population is – motivating big armies to get in and fight if you want to get the most out of your resource gathering.

"There was a great debate about upkeep," Sigaty says. "The community never loved it. I felt like it was a really good dilemma to put you in as a player. Great games are defined by compelling choices."





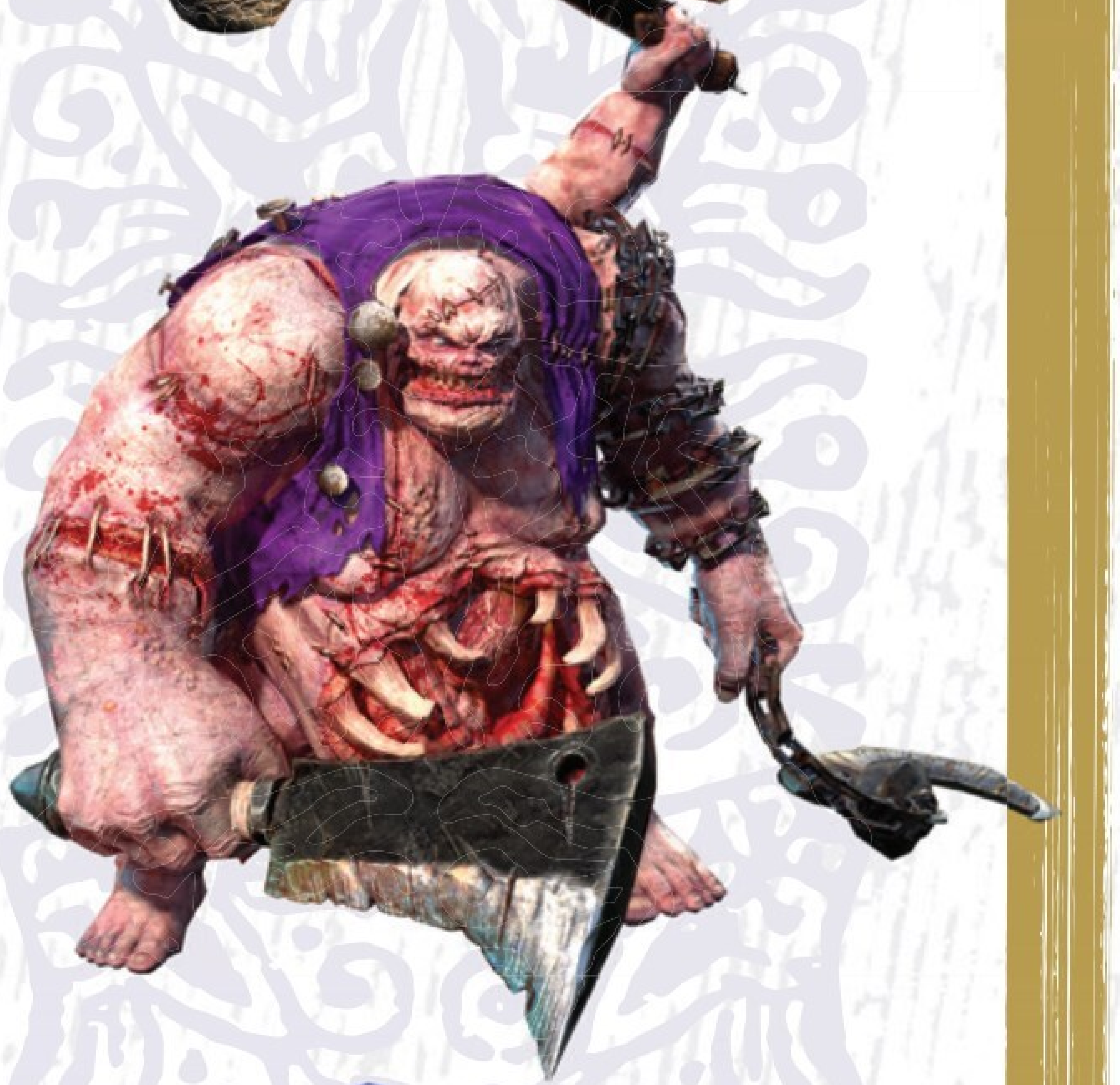


continued from page 51

Back to Stratholme. Where once Warcraft III dictated what would become World of Warcraft, World of Warcraft now influences Warcraft III. The opening sequence sets the stage with in-game cutscenes featuring Jaina, Arthas, and Uther. Another goal is to provide players with some perspective on exactly what's happening in the world. Where are they during these campaign missions? One way that's going to be accomplished is to actually use the World of Warcraft world map in the game, showing your voyage across Azeroth as you move from mission to mission. The effects of the changing story will also be visually represented on the map, such as showing the city of Stratholme in flames after the culling has been completed.

And Stratholme does look substantially different as I get into the map itself. The map has been remade to fit the style of the World of Warcraft dungeon, with a completely different layout. Notable landmarks from Stratholme, like Alonsus Chapel and Market Row, are featured front and center. The Orca statues and Grecian-style columns in the original have been removed from the map (though these will still be available for map makers), replaced with more thematically appropriate fare fitting for the doomed Alliance city. While there are plenty of small differences, the core gameplay of Warcraft III is unchanged, and I'm still tasked with making an army, razing the city, and smacking around Mal'Ganis if he gets in my way.

I'm churning out some units and getting my footmen, knights, and riflemen ready. The buildings in my city are as impressive as the units – so much more than the block-like barracks of a previous age. Other differences become readily apparent as I move through Stratholme, wielding Arthas' fury as I stomp out the undead. An immediately noticeable change is that I can choose to quickly click on citizens to kill them before they transform (and they are much, much easier to kill as townsfolk), signaling a bit of a transition from Blizzard's much earlier thoughts on murdering the poor citizens of the city before they become ghouls.



I LI EE
I T I L E

Warcraft III is going to look a lot different, but it's also going to sound and read differently. While the writers, editors, and voice actors behind the changes to dialogue, barks, and "pissed" lines are not trying to turn the game into a novel, they're looking to provide important context and texture to characters and experiences in the game. Characters that are still integral in the Warcraft universe have an opportunity to shine, both in terms of direct storytelling beats and subtle nods to current developments in WoW. The team refers to these changes as augmentation and revision, as they don't want to change the tale – but they do want to update it while avoiding the dreaded retcon.

One example of a possible change (the team is still locking down many of these refinements at the time of this writing) is some context for Arthas gaining his steed after becoming a Death Knight. There's no real explanation in the original title; he just shows up on his horse ready to kill things. A piece of lore originally in one of senior writer Christie Golden's books (and eventually alluded to inside World of Warcraft) is that Arthas had a rather unfortunate incident where his steed Invincible fell victim to his overconfidence. Arthas revives the horse from the grave after becoming a Death Knight, which further adds to his insistence to be right in every circumstance. In his mind, it reinforces that he was not only correct in culling Stratholme, but his error that killed his horse was arguably correct as well – if it was still alive it would have fled in terror from its master.

"As a novelist I'm drawn to how I can improve the richness of a character or the import of a scene," Golden says. "We had a couple of lines we added to the Culling of Stratholme because Arthas just goes, 'Whoops! They're infected, let's get them all!' So we have a little bit more back and forth with Jaina, about how he's coming to that conclusion and what's driving him. We forget how loved Arthas was – he was this bright shining new hope."

Many of the instances where larger changes occur involve threads from World of Warcraft, especially those involving Jaina and Sylvanas. In the original game, Jaina almost casually condemns her father to death as an offhand gesture. In Reforged, cases like the death of Admiral Proudmoore will have a bit more rationale given to players involving the decision. This extends to a similar situation with Sylvanas, where much of her origin happens offscreen – a new opportunity to give some backstory to one of Warcraft's most important current characters.

"For WoW players that haven't played Warcraft III, it's going to feel like part of that universe," says editor Justin Groot. "It's the definitive origin story for so many of these characters that are really critical in WoW. Everything that happened in this game set the stage for everything that's happened since, and those reverberations are continuing."

Also on deck for edits are lines that break immersion, line dialogue that feels out of place during Thrall's campaign, such as, "Great! Cause we're getting out of here!" during an escape. This extends toward unit barks and pissed quips to take on some of the dated pop-culture references, commercial riffs, song references, and shows, though the team wants to make sure they leave in some of that charm while adding new jokes.

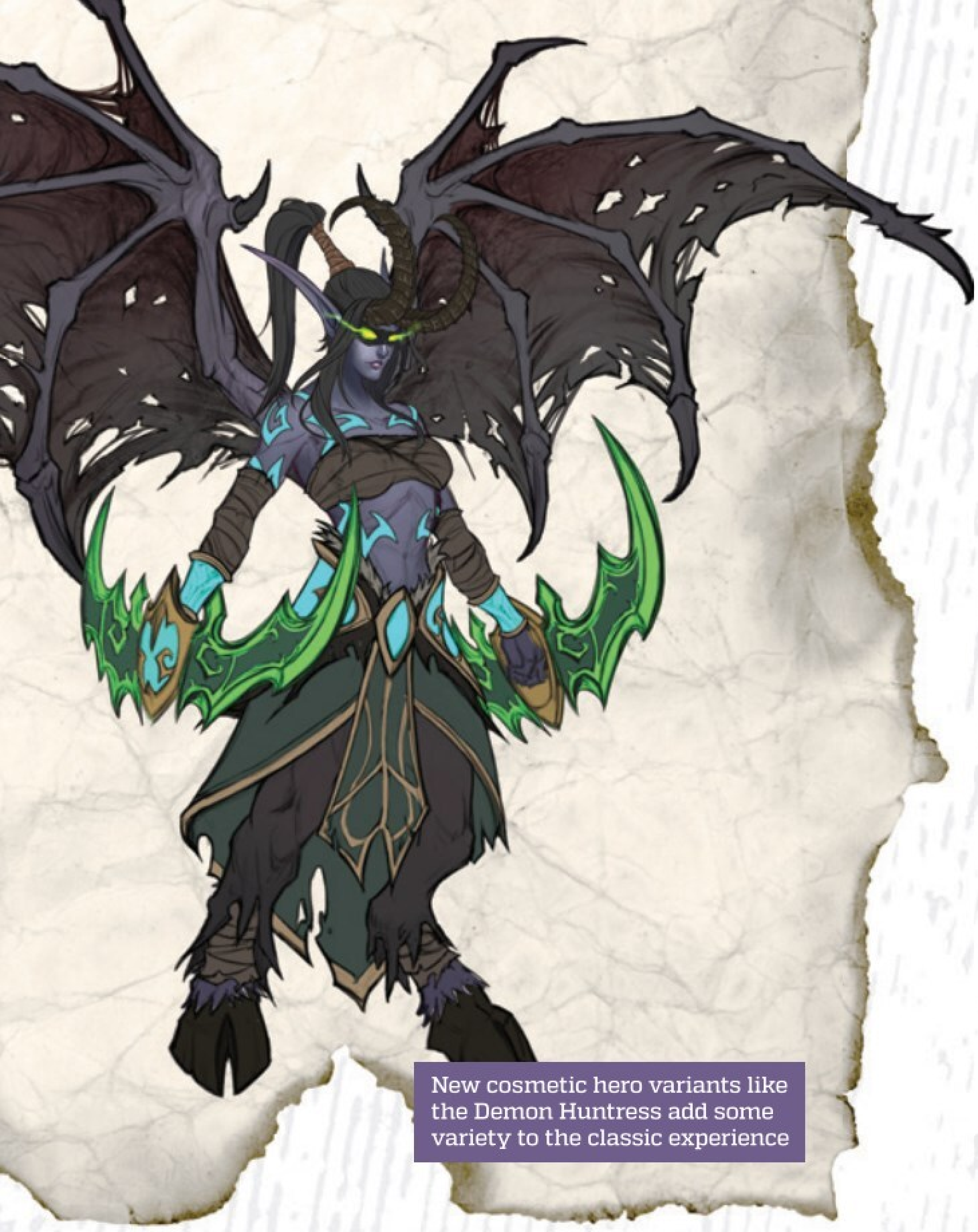
"We went through a really contentious discussion internally about how it played out," says Hearthstone executive producer Chris Sigaty, who was a producer on the original Warcraft III. "Initially it was a lot more brutal. They didn't turn into ghouls and undead – you were really culling townspeople. It was like so over-the-top we were like, 'Is this what Blizzard would do?' We knew it was an important moment for Arthas and that storyline, but it was also a pivotal moment for us. It felt like too much. How far do we go? It was too dark, we felt."

Back in the demo, I smash open one of the dwellings to get to the people inside, but I'm greeted with a rather unpleasant surprise. A giant abomination named Meathook waits inside for my ragtag band of ghoulbusters and does a number on them before I mop him up. I recognize the boss from the WoW dungeon, another addition to this version. Lead designer Matt Morris, who also worked on Warcraft III as a level designer, says similar experiences should be common as they renovate the maps. These little gestures break up the roteness of classic RTS campaign play, which often devolved into simply massing units and busting down enemies. I'm told another WoW necromancer boss, Salramm the Fleshcrafter, can also surprise unwary cullers.

"We started adding flavor," Morris says. "As you get closer and closer, you're doing the same thing at the end of the mission as you are at the start. There's no variance in gameplay. So we just started brainstorming, let's add some other stuff, like an event when you turn the corner on a street and the town militia comes after you. Just to kind of break it up a bit and make it feel different."

A change that takes a keener eye to notice is there are fewer buildings to smash and cull in the new Stratholme. There are the same number of civilians in total, but simply not as many houses.

As I move through the map, there are a few more flavor triggers that break up the constant slaughter, including a surprise wave of monsters that comes after me right as Mal'Ganis and his own army decide to interfere. Judicious use of Arthas' paladin abilities allow me to persevere with my knight companions. Pretty soon, I'm winning the mission and setting Arthas on his path of destruction and death, again communicated through fresh, improved in-game cutscenes. As I wrap things up, these subtle changes make a big difference to break up the level and form more of an immersive story rather than a "build 'em up and break 'em down" standard RTS level.



New cosmetic hero variants like the Demon Huntress add some variety to the classic experience

L ST T E LLI - FL

Just as fascinating as what made it into Warcraft III are things that didn't make it. While Blizzard often repurposes many aspects, characters, or mechanics into other creations, some of the concepts and scope for Warcraft III were left behind. Depending on who you talk to from the original team, there were anywhere from 6-13 races planned for the game, with the Infernals/Demons being one of the closest that didn't make the final cut. Many other races were rolled into factions that made it into the game, like the Tauren and Gnomes. However, some were simply too ambitious, like the Dragons. The player commands a single unit – a dragon. It would grow larger and then … uhh, do dragon things! Eventually trying to figure out how that single unit would work in a world where others had to build lumber mills and harvest gold was scrapped, but it's a great example of one of the cool concepts that never made it to fruition. Here are some more interesting things that got cut.

- A final night elf campaign mission was fully fleshed out, set to be played after the final battle with Archimonde, and went through many different designers' hands, but was scrapped because it was considered anticlimactic after the big conflict at the World Tree. Interestingly enough, Matt Morris says there's a slim chance that this mission or even others could be added to the game later down the line.
- The concept of night elves being more jungle-like insect-riders was bandied about, as well as dwarves riding spiders.
- An orc warlord hero that rode a mount, wielded a mace and torch, and had a variety of buffing abilities was scrapped, but the model did make it into the game.
- With World of Warcraft drawing everything from Warcraft III, there are a few notable instances of features that were left behind from the original WoW as well, including a big change to the existing ghost realm where players go when they die as they run back to their bodies. The ether or ghost zone was planned to be a fully playable high-level zone that low-level players would ooh and aah at as they traversed through the shadowy mist on the way back to their corpses. Players couldn't interact with anything, but they could see these huge decked-out players fighting high-level creatures and be inspired to get to a high level to experience it for themselves.
- WoW also featured a true-to-life day/night cycle that dictated when events, spawns, and other things could happen, but it was scrapped to avoid players having to leave their jobs (or lives) behind in order to make it home in time so they wouldn't miss something important.

The Culling of Stratholme is a small taste of the sweeping changes incoming. Even more is revealed with a dip into multiplayer. While only Orcs and Humans are playable in this build, anyone who played the original won't miss a beat. I immediately move to one of my old-school standbys, the Blademaster econ-harass rush. The tactic still works like a charm as I slice down miners and lumberjacks and windwalk to the shadows when I encounter resistance. The multiplayer experience is the same fans know and love, with an earth-shattering overhaul in terms of visuals.

The competitive ladder maps have already received a subtle-but-serious pass in terms of player spawn points, distance of camps and expansions from starting areas, item drop tables, and neutral building locations. Slight changes like this can be expected before and after launch. Creeps, where larger versions of gnolls, golems, trolls, and the rest of the supporting cast were simply palette swaps, are now visibly unique. Each increasing level of creep shows off real progression, with visual upgrades to armor, weapons, appendages, and more. Hero visual variety has been enhanced as well, with several new presentation options. Demon hunters can spawn as the demon huntress, death knights have a female version, and brewmasters have an alternate skin. You're getting the same heroes that you know and love, but more possibilities in how they appear when you grab a new friend from the altar or tavern.

FORGING THE FUTURE

Warcraft III: Reforged won't stop at release; post-launch support is planned. There are features in the idea stage

840
520
24/42
+10
+10
Keep

floating around – granted, ones that could never happen – that include new neutral buildings, new tilesets, new items, a new neutral hero for the tavern, and more.

Along with things that could happen, map makers now enjoy 24-player support (up from 12), fewer hardware restrictions so they can flood screens with units, and access to new tools that allow them to create more than ever before (the specifics are still being fleshed out here). Many amazing experiences from Footman Frenzy to Battleships to Gem TD to Defense of the Ancients (and the entire MOBA genre) found their footing with Warcraft III's custom game tools, and with a robust updated asset kit and an expanded toolkit, the next big genre could happen here – again.

Continued balance changes are on deck and currently happening, as Blizzard has already gone back and nerfed things like how Blademaster's critical-strike damage is calculated. As the casual and competitive scene comes back with an entire new legion of orcs, humans, night elves, and undead, expect plenty more.

The prospect of a real-time-strategy title entering the spotlight in 2019 is unbelievably alluring. While some may balk that it's not Warcraft IV, the hero-infused battles of days long past captured an entire generation of PC gamers, mapmakers, designers, and storytellers, setting the stage for one of the most iconic franchises in gaming history. I'm ready for it to happen again. ◆

For more on Warcraft 3: Reforged, visit our hub at gameinformer.com/warcraft3. You'll find information on the campaign, multiplayer, the history of Blizzard, exclusive interviews, and more

Control

The gang's all here

» Platform
PS4 • Xbox One • PC

» Style
1-Player Action

» Publisher
505 Games

» Developer
Remedy Entertainment

» Release
2019

Remedy Entertainment's Control emerged from E3 as one of the most intriguing reveals of the show, but several questions were left unanswered. While many of those questions still linger, I caught up with Remedy creative director Sam Lake to learn more about Control's characters and see how development is progressing.

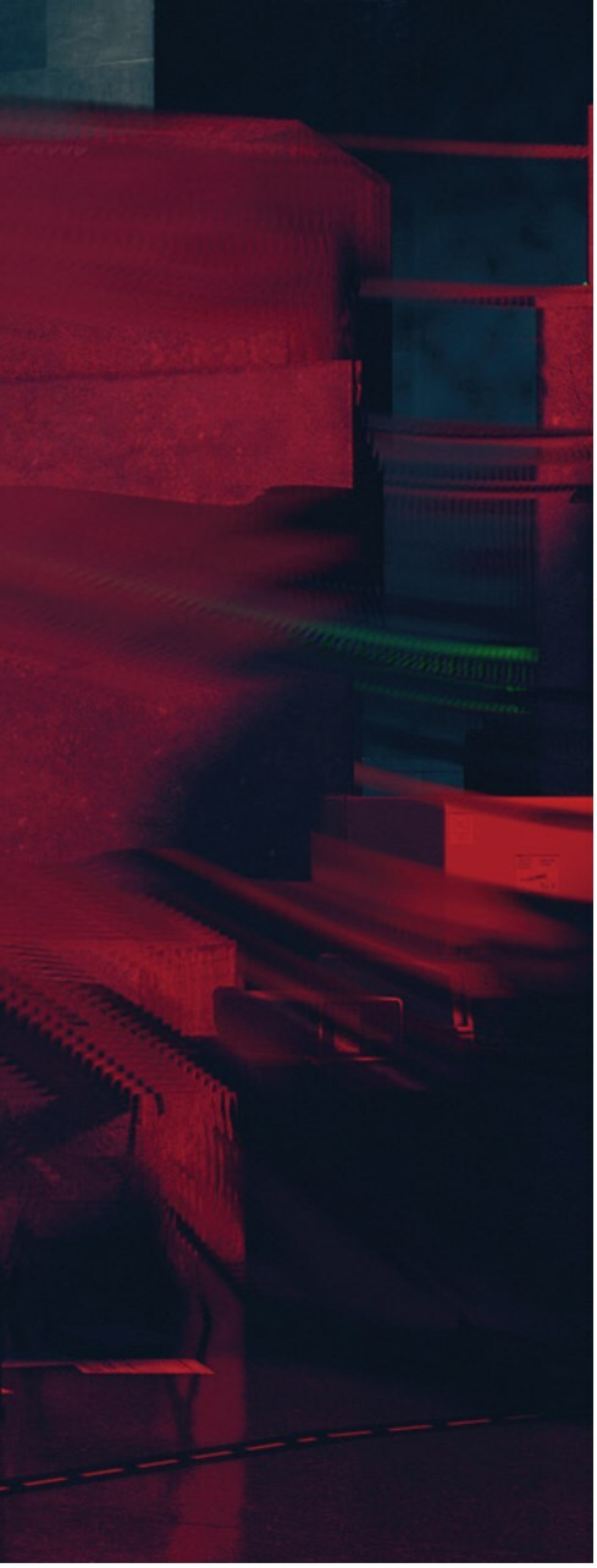
Control puts you in the shoes of Jesse Faden, a woman searching for answers after a traumatic encounter early in her life. She travels to the Oldest House, the headquarters of the Federal Bureau of Control, to investigate their findings in the unknown. The Federal Bureau of Control is responsible for investigating unexplainable phenomena in the outside world. Once Jesse enters the Oldest House, everything goes awry; the director is killed, and a mysterious force called the Hiss attacks, corrupting most of the employees in the building.

The idea of corruption is at the core of the experience. "It's not just possession. It's also corrupting in the sense of this unknowable, strange, negative force," Lake says. "Like something really violent and hostile coming in and disrupting and distorting and changing and taking over in unexpected ways. What does it want? It's spreading and it's taking over everything. The things that it can't take over, like Jesse, it tries to destroy."

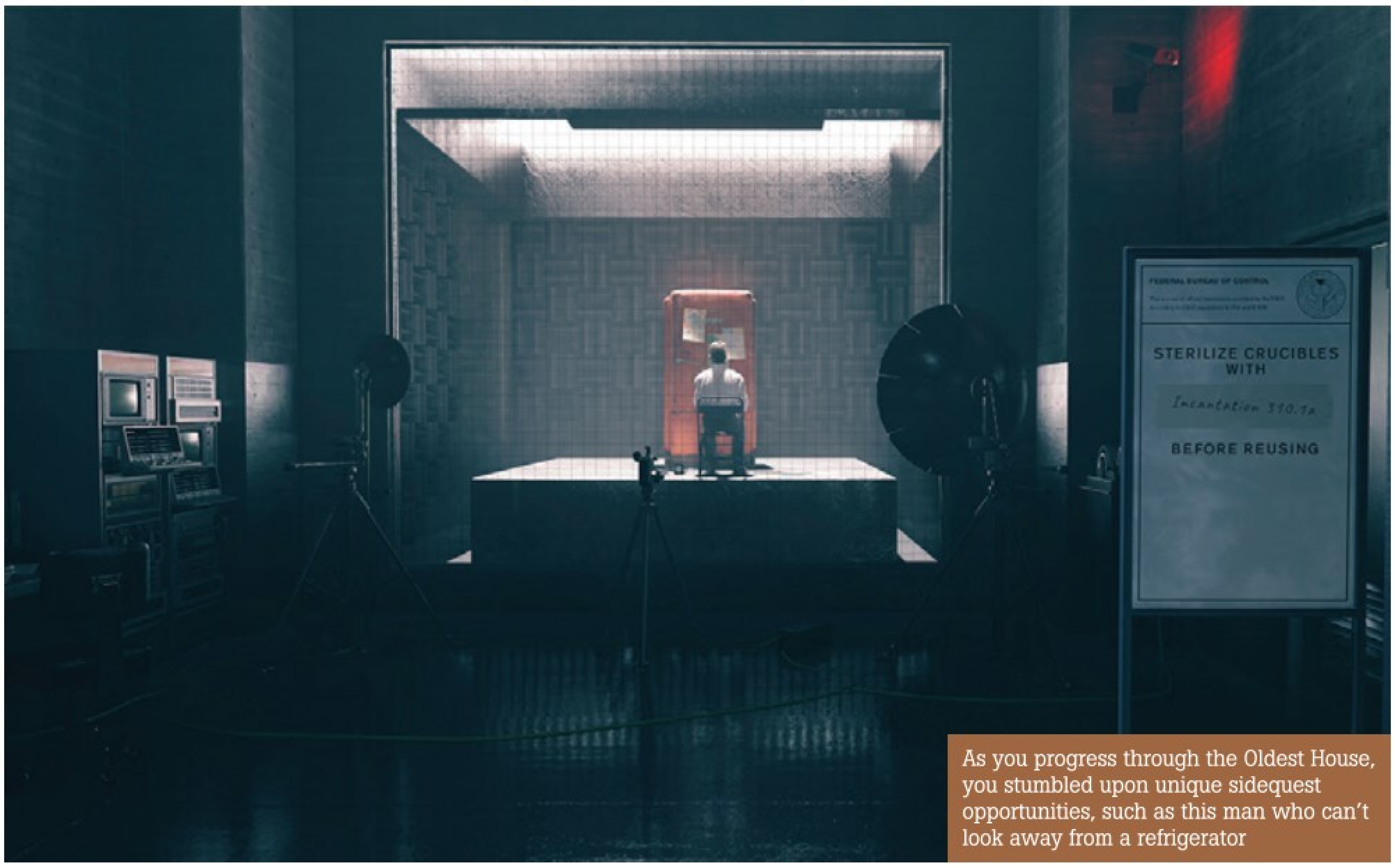
Jesse picks up a gun to defend herself, not realizing it's an object of power that belonged to the previous director. This object bestows abilities upon Jesse, and due to rules that may seem absurd, she becomes the new director of the FBC. While the story of Jesse grasping the full potential of her powers is compelling, the heart of the story revolves around her learning more about her past. "Jesse has things from her past that she knows, but she doesn't quite understand," Lake says. "She has formed her own theories about that, and we will learn more about those things. Definitely at the same time, coming into this place of power and discovering and obtaining this object of power and becoming the director, that's really affecting her in a fundamental way. Through that, you're unlocking her abilities as well."

With her newfound powers, Jesse can grab items from across the room with her mind to throw at enemies and pull the ground up to use as a shield. Remedy is aiming for satisfying destruction that reacts to how you want to play. "In most areas, you can wreak destruction and wreck the whole place," Lake says. "It is very dynamic. You can destroy all kinds of things, and you can use everything that you broke as a tool for the various abilities that you have. It is very dynamic and leads to some unexpected situations."

While Remedy is preparing a large suite of combat powers, traversal abilities like levitation allow Jesse to float around rooms and across gaps, giving



Jesse is played by Courtney Hope, who previously worked with Remedy on Quantum Break



As you progress through the Oldest House, you stumbled upon unique sidequest opportunities, such as this man who can't look away from a refrigerator

her better vantage points in fights and unlocking new areas she couldn't reach before. While the team won't divulge too much, Remedy promises other traversal abilities, such as the power to manipulate the Oldest House around her, allowing her to unlock new areas.

As Jesse travels through the Oldest House, the building shifts around her, creating dreamlike sequences. At the end of the E3 demo, Jesse approaches an astral plane tied to objects of power and ritualistic trials. Jesse's mission is to cleanse the building of the Hiss, and when she achieves that, the building moves and she can access new areas. Some rituals even distort the area around Jesse to look like she's not in the Oldest House at all. One I saw took place in a motel-like setting.

The Oldest House plays host to several weird items the Bureau is investigating. In one sequence, Jesse encounters a man forced to watch a refrigerator because if he looks away, it will transform into something terrible. If you choose to help him, it initiates a side mission. The fridge is just one example of an "altered item" the Bureau has obtained through its investigations. It brings these items back to the Oldest House to research them and use them for their own gain.

Remedy recently unveiled a portion of Control's cast, featuring actors who have worked with the studio before. Courtney Hope, who played Beth Wilder in Quantum Break, steps into the lead role as Jesse. Meanwhile, the supporting cast features Matthew Porretta (the voice of Alan Wake) as Dr. Casper Darling, and James McCaffrey (the voice of Max Payne) as Zachariah Trench.

Casper Darling is the head scientist at the Bureau, and he deals with the most dangerous, unexplainable things the FBC encounters. Because of this, he's a brilliant man who can be reclusive due to all the secrets he's unable to share. This leads to him acting rather eccentric. For example, he might stroll into a briefing, crack some jokes – maybe even sing a karaoke song – then leave without any explanation. Because of his involvement with the Bureau's most dangerous research, Jesse wants to seek him out to see what answers he has for her.

Zachariah Trench is the most recent director of the Federal Bureau of Control. He's killed very early in the story, but he's left behind as an echo to guide Jesse on the adventure. He also serves as another mystery players can work to figure out. What happened to Trench, who killed him, and what led to the current crisis in the Oldest House?

While it's not easy to wrap my head around what to expect with Remedy's latest game, every new scrap of detail makes me more excited for Control's launch next year. » **Brian Shea**

Fallout 76

Three tantalizing hours in the wasteland

» Platform
PS4 • Xbox One • PC

» Style
24-Player Online
Action/Role-Playing

» Publisher
Bethesda Softworks

» Developer
Bethesda Game Studios

» Release
November 14

Reclamation Day is almost here, vault dwellers. On November 14, you'll have the chance to return to the surface to reestablish humanity's place in West Virginia.

Your first steps will be familiar. With the iconic blue and gold Vault-Tec jumpsuit fit snuggly around your body, you'll rely on a trusty, old Pip-Boy 2000 to guide you. In these first few minutes of play, Fallout 76 seems like it's just more Fallout. It looks and plays exactly like you would expect.

The one thing that is noticeably different is how quiet the world is. West Virginia is vast and covered in woodlands teeming with mutated beasts, but you are the only human for miles. Unless one of your friends hops online to join your adventure, you may not interact with another person, human or A.I., for your entire play session.

I recently played through three hours of Fallout 76 at a press event.The lack of human interaction was something that hit me immediately, and it became more pronounced as I moved out of the wilderness and into cities that once showed signs of life but were now eerie ghost towns. Not having traditional NPC characters to interact with is a huge change for the series; these characters have been pivotal in making the worlds feel alive. They also helped deliver the narrative, and pushed players to shape their characters through difficult choices.

All of that is gone. You now rely on audio files, notes, and terminals to learn about the world, and gain context for the missions you are about to embark on. If you're playing the game by yourself, the audio and text approach is serviceable. Not being able to place a face to the voice you hear is certainly disappointing, but much like the BioShock series, you can soak up story details as you move about the world. When other players enter the equation, which Bethesda is hoping will be the central hook of Fallout 76, reading extensive notes and listening to audio is often problematic, as your teammates will likely be communicating with you constantly as you journey together. Are people really going to say, "Hang on a second, gang. I need to spend a few minutes reading these computer documents" or "Everyone be quiet for a minute. I have a tape to listen to"? The answer is likely "no." From my early experience, Bethesda's decision to forego NPCs with the hopes of other human players filling that void appears to be a huge swing and miss.

Again, I only played three hours of the game, but the omission of that one, huge aspect of the Fallout experience brought up warning flags. Was it enough to kill the fun? No, not even close. I enjoyed almost every second I spent in the wasteland, thanks largely to the camaraderie shared between my teammates. Questing together and making discoveries with friends is a blast, even if you don't necessarily know why you're venturing to places or what you are looking for.

Having people at your side heightens the experience in a number of key areas. Knowing that someone has your back reduces those moments of uncertainty when entering new locations. In a city that appears to be deserted, a new ghoul type called the Scorched crawled out of the woodwork, and I quickly found myself in a no-win situation. Thankfully, their numbers were quickly whittled down by the heavy firepower my teammate was packing. I was able to stand my ground and pick away at the threat. In Fallout games of old, I would have been forced into an awkward back pedaling retreat where I tried to thin their numbers as I moved away from the conflict zone.

Teammates even make loot-hunting more efficient, as they can call out the location of safes, chests, and other things you may want to grab. If you split up in the world, new quests your friends grab are also added to your queue. The number of quests I obtained in such a short period of time was a bit overwhelming, yet left my team with no shortage of things to do. We embarked on a number of missions that took us to interesting locations, and pushed us to venture deeper into West Virginia. As we made tracks to these places, we stumbled upon some of the more dangerous enemies in the wasteland, including a dragon-like bat called the Scorchbeast. This flying monstrosity made short work of one of my teammates, and put a dent in my precious survival supplies and ammo.

Once I reached level five (which took a couple hours), I was alerted that PvP was enabled. Seconds after learning I could harm other people, a level 59 player strolled into view. I smacked him in the face with the butt of my gun. He sat motionless for a few seconds, and then directed a "thumb down" emote my way. I was then hit with a lightning blast that dropped me to my knees. My teammates retaliated and tried to revive me, but he easily dispatched all of them, and even delivered a death blow to me. Thankfully, he was nice enough to not steal my junk supply, which every downed player drops. At this point I learned I could seek revenge, but knew I wouldn't stand a chance against this juggernaut until I leveled up more. Bethesda says it evens out player levels a little to make PvP encounters more competitive, but the gap in this conflict was far too great for us to stand a chance.

This level 59 player poses a threat, but cannot go around griefing every low-level player he comes across. PvP is an opt-in affair, meaning his weapons won't do much damage to you until you return fire and show you intend to battle to the death.

Depending on where you go, you also receive a number of notices to partake in regional events. Some of these are triggered as you explore certain locations, but others appear at specific times for the entire server. The game also offers rotating daily and weekly challenges, and player-specific challenges, such as leaving Vault 76 for the first time and exploring Appalachia for one hour.

At the conclusion of my play session I was able to reach level seven, which was more than enough to apply at least one attribute to each field in the new card-based S.P.E.C.I.A.L. system. Getting bumps for Stimpaks and specific weapon types helps in these early stages of the game, but I didn't get any cards that dramatically altered the way I played the game. On the plus side, the collectible-card format allows players to quickly reconfigure their abilities, and can even shuffle them up for specific zones or encounters. The cards are one of the more intriguing elements, especially since there are hundreds to collect and use, but three hours wasn't nearly enough time to truly see of what they are capable.

Outside of this new approach, Fallout 76's gameplay fits like a glove for veterans of the series. Basic character movement, weapon usage, and inventory management are all stripped right from Fallout 4. One big change is having to curb your character's hunger and thirst. When these begin to deplete, your AP takes a hit – meaning you won't be able to run as long, jump as much, or use V.A.T.S. This survival aspect isn't something you have to constantly monitor. I only fed my player a few times in my play session, and learned I could get cards that would help with hunger and thirst. If either meter depletes completely, you slowly lose health.

Thanks to V.A.T.S., the Fallout series is welcoming to people who aren't great at shooters. In past games, you could activate this limb-specific targeting system to slow the action down and have success be determined by percentages rather than twitch reflexes. This is no longer the case in Fallout 76. V.A.T.S. can still be used to target limbs, but since you are online with other players, it no longer freezes the action – everything unfolds in real time. Given how much some enemies scurry about the environment, V.A.T.S. isn't as effective as a weapon now, since its timing requires a higher degree of skill. V.A.T.S. may give you some advantages with sniper rifles and other ranged armaments, but I don't see it as a reliable solution for crowd control or close-quarters skirmishes. I struggled with it in those instances, but did get an idea of how it can be used to pick away at specific slower-moving enemy types.

Even after enjoying my time with friends and having strong opinions about some of Bethesda's designs, three hours wasn't nearly enough time to formulate a true opinion of Fallout 76. It still plays and looks like the games we know and love, but part of its soul appears to be missing. Characters and world building are a big part of Fallout's DNA. We'll have to wait and see if questing with friends is a worthwhile replacement for these beloved elements of the Fallout experience.
» **Andrew Reiner**

Battlefield V

Re-engaging on multiple fronts

» Platform
PS4 • Xbox One • PC

» Style
1-Player Shooter
(64-Player Online)

» Publisher
Electronic Arts

» Developer
DICE

» Release
November 20

The single-player mode in 2016's Battlefield 1 was an interesting change of direction for developer DICE. Instead of telling the story of one soldier or squad, the campaign told several war stories, reaching across continents and conflicts to get across how The Great War affected those who took part. DICE is keeping that format intact for Battlefield V, though it's also making some key changes.

With its second round of war stories, DICE is exploring WWII conflicts we typically don't see in popular media. The one campaign I played all the way through, Nordlys, pits Norwegian commando Solveig Bjørnstad against the German occupation of Rjukan, Norway, as she attempts to extract another operative from the field.

One change DICE is touting is how every war story takes place in its native language. Nordlys is in Norwegian. Tirailleur, which takes place on the southern shores of France, is in French. Under No Flag, which follows a British special agent bounced out of prison, is in English. Those averse to foreign films or reading subtitles might not take to the change, but I love the authentic touch this lends each story.

I played through most of Nordlys stealthily, and made way to my first objective undetected, mostly due to the fairly lax A.I. patrols. Even if I was spotted by an enemy, I was able to chuck a throwing knife at them before they could alert anyone else, letting me continue incognito. Even in the the midst of a blizzard (which looked incredible), during which I jumped from bonfire to bonfire to avoid freezing to death, I could get the drop on groups of enemies and wipe them all out without engaging in real combat.

A later mission in this campaign shows off the other major change at play: a bigger focus on open-ended objectives. While war stories are still linear narrative experiences, most of what I played took cues from Nothing Is Written, the Battlefield 1 war story set against the backdrop of the Arab Revolt. I was frequently placed outside of a large encampment and tasked with destroying or capturing multiple distant objectives. More often than not, I also had a pretty good vantage point from which I could scout out enemy placements and plan my attack route.

These segments felt like a better adaptation of Battlefield to single-player than the more linear scenarios. I didn't get up to any outlandish hijinks while scouting out enemies and disabling alarms, but I get the sense more creative players can find ways to squeeze some memorable moments out of these encounters.

Not all of the objectives allow for varied approaches, however. The portion of Tirailleur I played took place entirely in open combat, as I ducked behind cover and crawled through trenches to break through the enemy's fortified position. This meant going for the more conventional approach of shooting at hostile soldiers from behind cover, then hunkering down and defending a point from a few waves of foes, including a tank.

DICE found success with war stories before, and I'm happy to see Battlefield V return to the format. Although it may not have the staying power of a single, bombastic campaign, what I've played leaves me excited to see the biggest conflict of the 20th century from new perspectives.

» Suriel Vazquez

Resident Evil 2

True to the original with horrifying new twists

The Resident Evil 2 remake has generated positive buzz since it was unveiled at E3. With the game just a few months away, Capcom has been showcasing more of its re-envisioning of the beloved title. We recently went hands-on with the game, and it delivers classic Resident Evil gameplay with resource management, puzzles, and exploration. That said, the experience still feels fresh, with new terrors around every corner. In addition to our demo controlling Claire after an intense fight with William Birkin, we spoke with the developers to learn more about the team's creative vision.

Capcom is working hard to ensure this entry has plenty of callbacks for longtime fans and stays true to the original's essence. "We really rewrote the game from the ground up with the same key story beats and some surprises in store as well," says producer Yoshiaki Hirabayashi. This means, even for fans, sequences, locations of things, and characters come together in unexpected ways; this isn't a one-to-one recreation. "Don't think you know it or have seen it all before, just because you know the original," Hirabayashi says.

Even so, you can still expect nods to some of the more comical lines. "We are often asked about the b-movie, cheesy aspect of the game because it's one of the legacies of the series, especially for Western fans," Hirabayashi says. "While we've tried to make it more grounded and believable, we couldn't resist leaving in a few little Easter eggs."

While you can expect some cheese, hardcore fans might also spot some references and similarities to 1.5, a legendary, unreleased predecessor to the final game. Capcom already announced an Elsa Walker costume for Claire, but there may be some more subtle inspirations to spot. "We didn't have a baseline concept of let's combine 1.5 and 2, but the two directors on [this remake] are both veterans of series and they were on during the 1.5 days," Hirabayashi says. "I think on some level, they've had some 1.5 stuff in their heads that have been expressed in the game. But it's not a main objective to resurrect 1.5 or anything like that, although we haven't forgotten about it."

The team worked hard to keep this entry more grounded, and the new graphics certainly pay off. "We tried to update it for a more believable, grander feel because it's using the RE engine for this amazing photorealistic look," Hirabayashi says. This new realistic touch informed everything, right down to the look of the zombies and having puzzle objects make sense for the setting.

"We want to make sure that every zombie and character in this game is truly terrifying and life-threatening," adds producer Tsuyoshi Kanda. "We got this 'wet gore,' as we call it, where they just look glistening and horrible. We also have the ragdoll physics on the way the zombies move. You might think you've got them down but then they come back to life and grab you again. Even the way you can aim for different parts and dismember them, we put a lot of effort into realistic damage and making the zombies the best zombies we ever made."

We feel this tension firsthand in our demo when we encounter a pair of lickers. Every enemy in this game feels dangerous, especially when a misstep or two can easily lead to your death. True to the series, you must think in the moment: Use your gun or run? Either way, there's a horrifying encounter awaiting you. » **Kimberley Wallace**

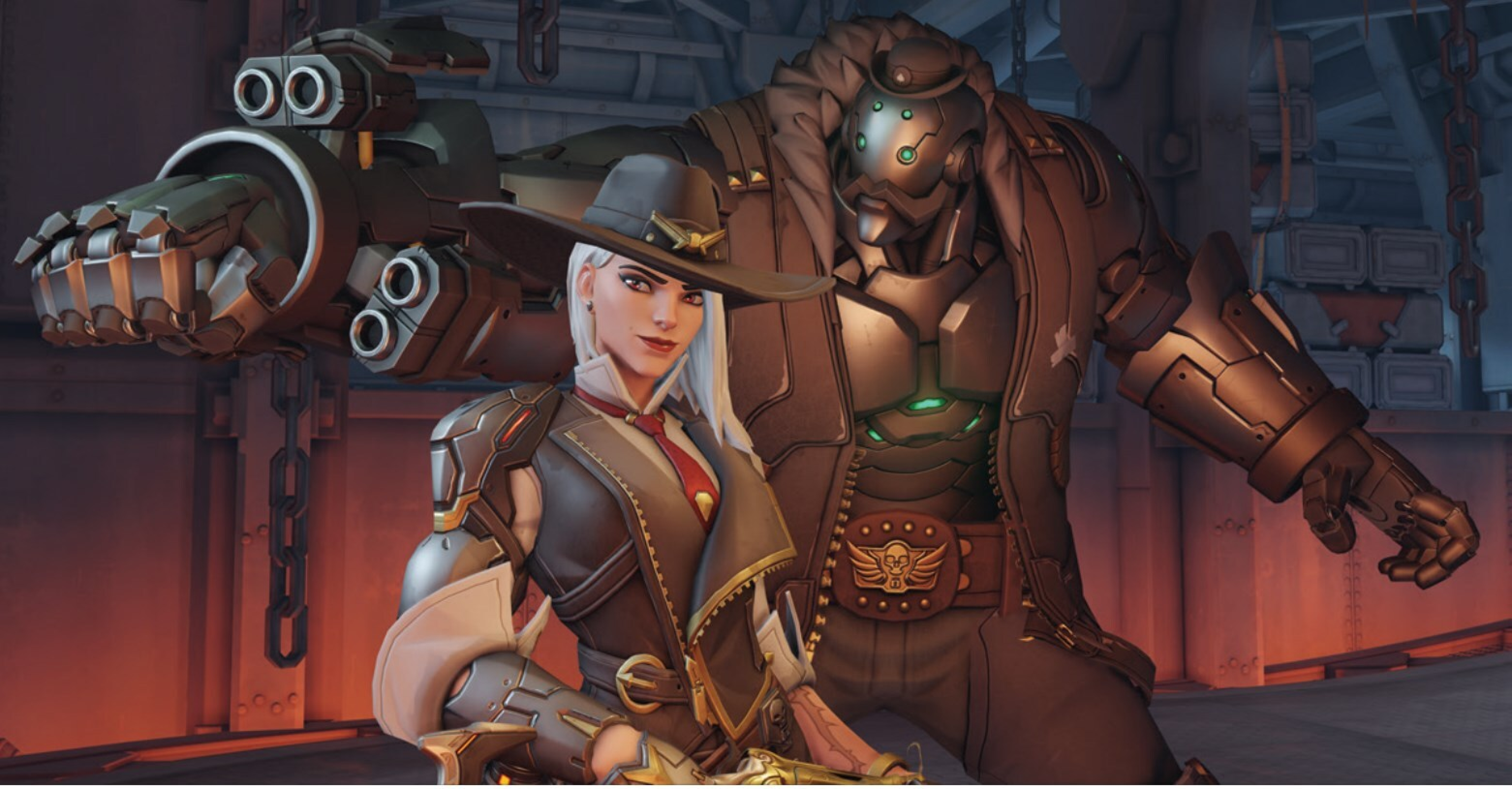
» **Platform**
PS4 • Xbox One • PC

» **Style**
1-Player Action

» **Publisher**
Capcom

» **Developer**
Capcom

» **Release**
January 25



Overwatch

Another hero joins the fray

» Platform
PS4 • Xbox One • PC

» Style
Online Multiplayer Shooter

» Publisher
Blizzard Entertainment

» Developer
Blizzard Entertainment

» Release
November

Overwatch fans knew McCree was part of an outlaw group called the Deadlock Gang, but most assumed he was the one calling the shots before being taken down by Overwatch. It turns out the leader of the gang is someone named Ashe. She isn't your typical bandit, and actually doesn't need the money her crew was receiving for the illegal weapons they were trafficking. Her family is filthy rich, and Ashe formed the gang out of rebellious boredom.

Since Ashe's family focused on their successful businesses instead of paying attention to her, she formed a relationship with the family's robotic butler. Affectionately named B.O.B., this A.I.-driven assistant has been at Ashe's side for her entire life, and he's even a part of the Deadlock Gang. B.O.B. has also been outfitted for war with armor plating and a chain gun.

Ashe is a jack-of-all-trades offensive hero whose main weapon would technically be classified as hit-scan, but her abilities allow her to deal damage in a variety of ways. Her primary weapon is a lever-action rifle that gives her a range between Soldier 76 and Widowmaker. While it might sound like her gun would be slow on reloads, she's a wizard with it and can fire off shots and reload surprisingly fast. This gun has a bit of spread to the shot and deals great damage per bullet. If you hit someone in the head, they're in for a world of hurt, especially when using the alternate fire iron-sight mode. When looking down the sight, Ashe can zoom in on a target, but not nearly as much as Widowmaker can.

If Ashe engages in close-range combat, she may be better off using abilities, as her low health of 200 means she won't last long if she's in the line of fire. Her first option is a sawed-off shotgun called the Coach Gun. One blast from this beast knocks back both Ashe and the enemies it hits. If Ashe fires it into the ground, the force of the blast will propel her into the air, which can be used as a defensive measure to leap over walls or bounce away from trouble.

Her second ability is dynamite. When thrown on the ground, the dynamite has a long fuse, and can catch enemies off guard. When it detonates, everyone nearby takes on significant damage and catches fire. If Ashe has a steady hand, she can also shoot the dynamite out of mid-air to down Mercy or Pharah, or catch an enemy that tries to run away.

Ashe already sounds like a living weapon locker, but her most powerful attack is her Ultimate, which summons B.O.B.. When the Ultimate is activated, B.O.B. leaps over Ashe, sprints forward and uppercuts the first enemy he sees. While the adversary is airborne, Ashe can finish them off. If her aim isn't on point, B.O.B. will plant his feet into the ground and pull out his arm cannon. At this point, B.O.B. is essentially a turret that deals significant damage. What makes B.O.B. different than most turrets or "pets," as Overwatch's development team calls them, is that he can be healed. If Ana's on your team, she can Nano Boost him. However, if she's your adversary, she can use her sleep dart to deal with him. Furthermore, if B.O.B. is on a capture point, he will claim it without any other teammates on that space. Once B.O.B. is planted, he won't move, but his 1,200 base health means teams will have to focus on him to remove the threat.

Ashe and B.O.B. should currently be available on Overwatch's public test region on PC, and will be rolling out to PlayStation 4 and Xbox One in the coming weeks. » **Andrew Reiner**

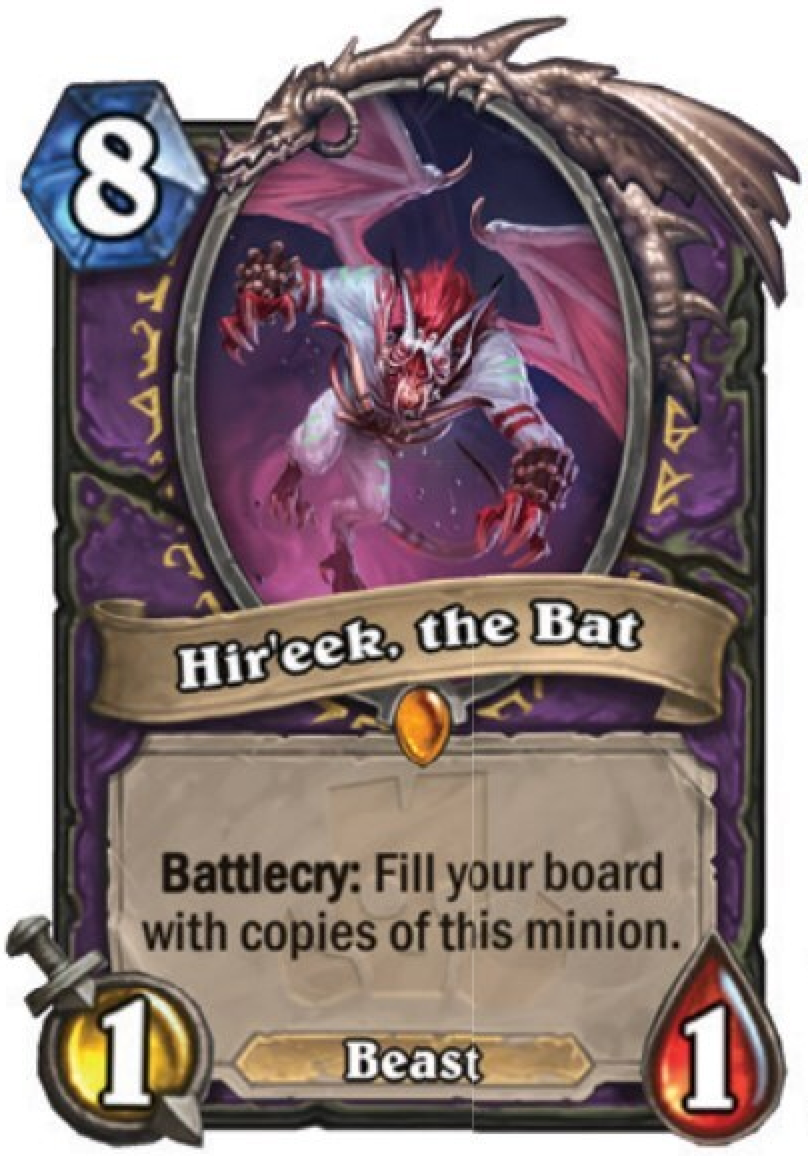
Hearthstone: Rastakhan's Rumble

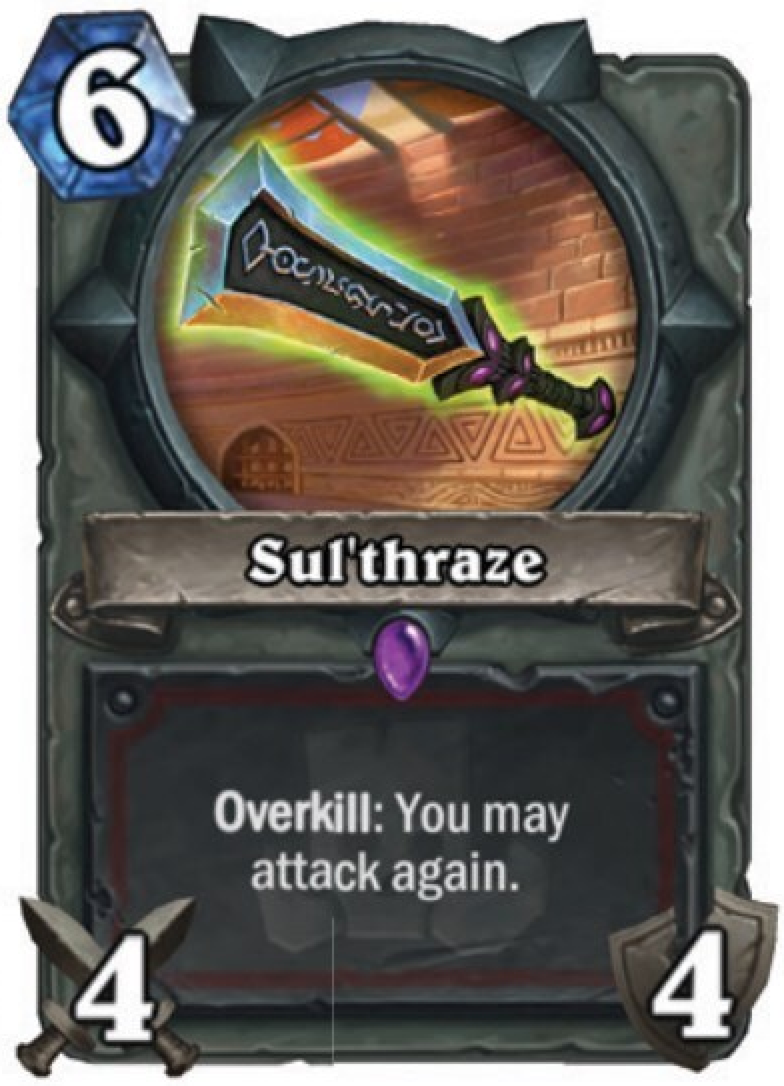
Trolls head to the arena

- » **Platform**
  PC • Mac • iOS • Android
- » **Style**
  1 or 2-Player Online Strategy
- » **Publisher**
  Blizzard Entertainment
- » **Developer**
  Blizzard Entertainment
- » **Release**
  December 4

New mechanics and features are par for the course in any Hearthstone expansion, but Rastakhan's Rumble is a celebration of everything troll in the Warcraft universe, past and present. Tying in themes from Warcraft old and new, going all the way back to the now-defunct raid Zul'Gurub and drawing from present day Battle for Azeroth and Zuldazar, this expansion is loaded with Loa, spirits, and Gurubashi Arena gladiatorial combat.

Every class gets a new legendary troll champion to build around. These champions, like Zul'jin, High Priestess Jeklik, War Master Voone, and Captain Hooktusk can all have powerful interactions with accompanying Loa and spirits. The Warlock Loa, Hir'eek the Bat, fills the entire board with copies of the 1/1 beast when you play it. This is perfect for enabling a death engine that fuels your other cards, like Warlock's Spirit of the Bat, which gives a minion in your hand +1/+1 whenever a creature dies. In this fashion, you can either conjure up a board full of fuel to beef up another creature in your hand, or ideally buff up a Hir'eek before you play it, creating multiple copies of an enormous, enhanced bat. Setting up combos and interactions between each class troll, Loa, and spirit is easy to understand and execute, and gives players new options to chase down for the metagame. Spirits all come into the game stealthed for a single turn as well, giving you a much better chance to play off their abilities before they are destroyed.


8
Hir'eek, the Bat
Battlecry: Fill your board with copies of this minion.
1
Beast
1


6
Sul'thraze
Overkill: You may attack again.
4
4

Other themes include a pirate-centric focus for Captain Hooktusk – and swarms of swashbucklers culminating in a Cannon Barrage that can wipe out an opponent's board or outright kill them with a ship full of brigands on the board. A brand-new mechanic, Overkill, rewards players for doing more than enough damage to kill a minion to gain a bonus effect. The Sul'thraze is a new weapon that shows off the mechanic, allowing the wielder to attack again on an Overkill – potentially cutting down up to four enemy minions in a single turn.

In addition to the 135 new cards, the set features a single-player experience like previous roguelike dungeon crawls called the Rumble Run. Players access shrines that create immensely powerful passive effects like triple-deathrattle or massive damage return auras. Here's the catch – your opponents also have shrines with these absurd buffs. However, the shrines are vulnerable, appear on the board as targetable objects, and have health values. Destroying shrines takes them out for three turns, so you must weigh the benefits of going after the opposing shrine, minions, or the opponent themselves.

Warcraft trolls are always a blast, so a Hearthstone expansion calling out the lore and Loa looks like a dinosaur slam-dunk. I'm eager to summon the spirits, especially in the single-player content come December. » **Daniel Tack**

Diablo Immortal

Hack and slash in your pocket

» Platform
iOS • Android

» Style
Online Multiplayer
Role-Playing

» Publisher
Blizzard Entertainment

» Developer
NetEase Games

» Release
2019

Diablo II: Lord of Destruction ended in a massive battle that turned a mountain into a smoldering crater. This epic encounter set up the events of Diablo III, but that story took place 20 years later – and 20 years is a long time for a world to be without a hero. That's why Blizzard has teamed up with NetEase Games to tap into this previously unexplored period between the two games.

"A mobile phone today is like a supercomputer from years ago," says lead game designer Wyatt Cheng. "We have these supercomputers in our pocket, but people approach mobile games with a certain set of assumptions. I want to challenge those assumptions. There is no reason you can't play a great game on your mobile device. Our goal is to bring an authentic Diablo experience to the supercomputers in our pockets."

During our recent trip to Blizzard's campus, we went hands-on with this mobile loot fest and immediately took to the controls. Players move their hero around the battlefield with a virtual stick and select various abilities from the right side of the screen, all of which feature their own cooldowns. The controls feel surprisingly natural, and you can drag the icon for each ability across the battlefield to target specific enemies. However, I made it through most battles by just tapping each ability and letting the auto-targeting take care of the rest.

Diablo Immortal features six playable heroes: monk, wizard, necromancer, witch hunter, barbarian, and crusader. Blizzard is still experimenting with the finer details, but right now players can choose which five abilities to equip at any given time. One third of these abilities are old favorites like the barbarian's whirlwind, which turns this muscle-bound hero into a tornado of blades. Another third of the abilities are tweaked versions of skills from previous games. Finally, Blizzard is also working on a set of completely new skills. We got a taste of the wizard's Lightning Nova, which allowed us to conjure and direct a lightning storm that completely decimated groups of small enemies.

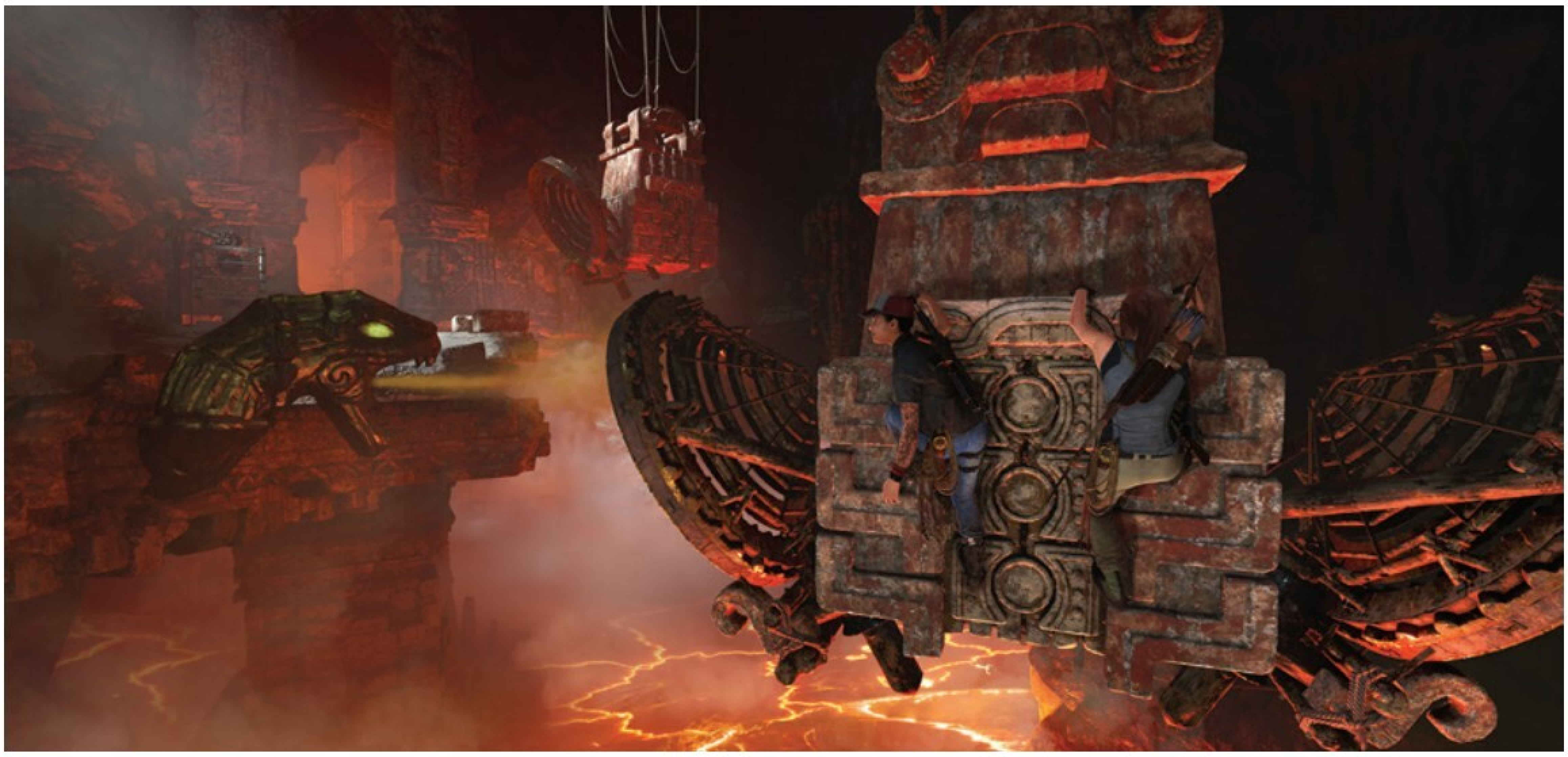
"The modification skill runes from Diablo III were pretty cool, but they almost ate into the legendary items," Cheng says. "Players got these skill runes for playing, pretty much for free. It was like, 'Okay, you just gave me five skill runes. I like this one, and I'll never look at these four again.' We probably don't want to do it that way again. It's too early to say, but right now the plan is to have the skills be the way they are and add legendary items that will do awesome things to modify them."

Diablo Immortal is similar to Diablo III in one way: It is always online, so players need a stable internet connection to play. Blizzard plans to launch with at least eight zones, which will be populated with respawning monsters as well as other random players – kind of like an MMO. However, players looking for a slightly intimate experience can jump into one of Immortal's seven instances, which will be tuned to challenge four players. We asked Blizzard about matchmaking and the team said this feature is still being designed, and it would have more details further down the line.

Blizzard also isn't ready to talk about how much Immortal will cost or how it plans to monetize the game after launch, but considering the game is called Immortal, Blizzard plans to support it for a long time. Fans looking for a portable hack and slash will be able to explore the lost stories between Diablo II and III later next year. **» Ben Reeves**

Shadow Of The Tomb Raider

Charting new destinations



» Platform
PS4 • Xbox One • PC

» Style
1-Player Action
(2-Player Online)

» Publisher
Square Enix

» Developer
Eidos Montreal

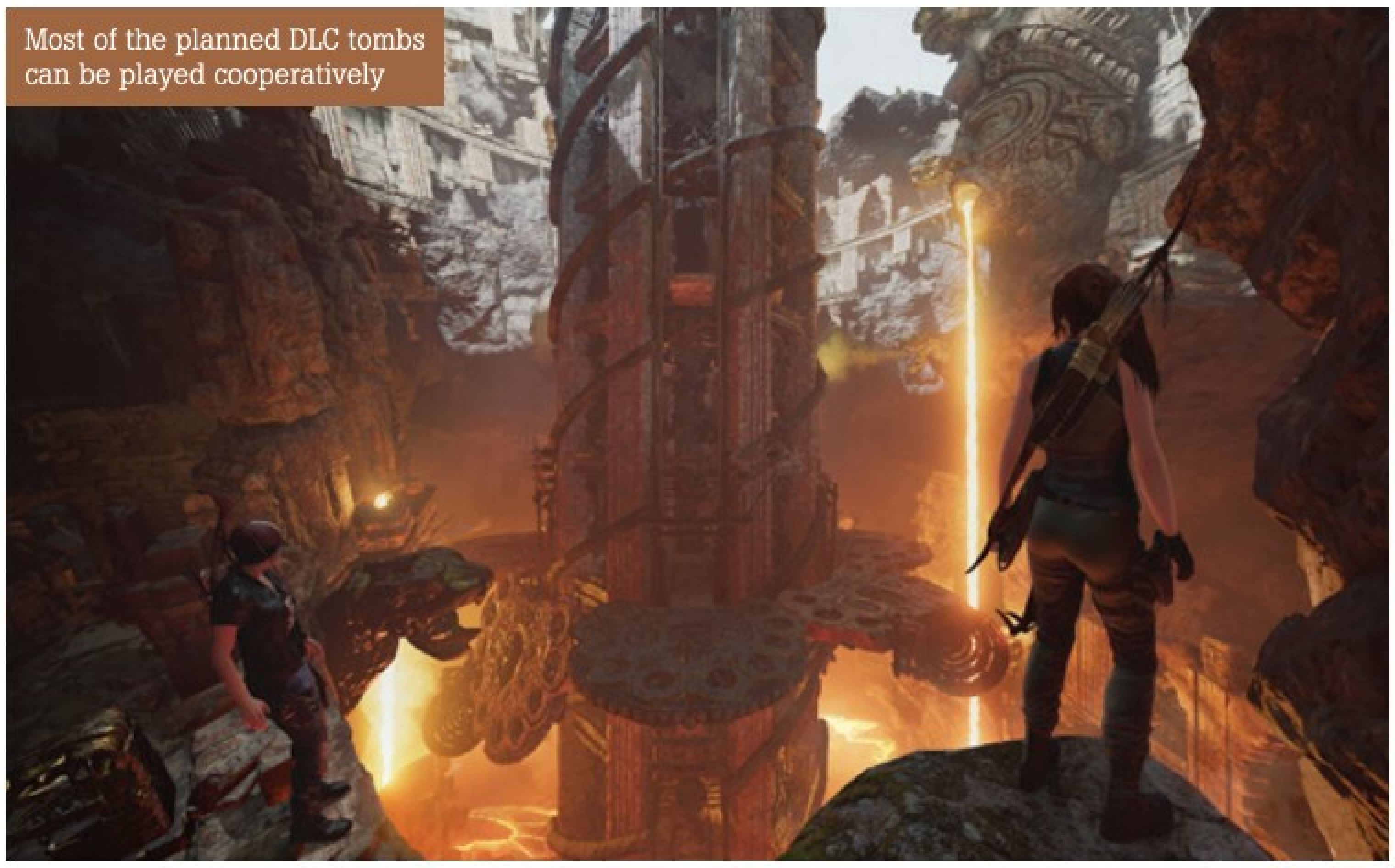
» Release
November 13 (The Forge),
TBA (DLC 2 – 7)

If you thought completing Shadow of the Tomb Raider when it launched in September meant you saw the end of Lara's story, Eidos Montreal has much more in store for you. The developer is intent on improving the experience through a robust post-launch DLC roadmap that begins this month.

Each release brings with it a new narrative side mission, tomb, costume, weapon, and skill for Lara. The first DLC launch lets players unlock the Grenadier skill, the Brocken outfit, and the Umbrage 3-80 rifle. Each DLC mission takes place before the final story battle except for the last one, which is set after the main campaign. Each tomb is playable in standard exploration mode, time attack, or score attack, and five of the seven tombs can be completed cooperatively.

While I didn't get a chance to see the new narrative mission, I played through the new tomb included with the first downloadable release, The Forge. True to its name, you can expect plenty of molten lakes and metallurgy tools throughout as you swing pendulums, ignite flammable gas, and rotate a giant platform to reach the prize at the top. Playing cooperatively made this much easier; not only could I reach new areas inaccessible to solo players, but having someone to throw switches and act as an extra set of eyes is immensely helpful. However, because you're working together as a team, both players must reach the tomb's goal to complete it, so don't expect to exploit the system and leave your partner in the dust.

The Forge focuses on Abby, but I also learned more about what to expect with the remaining content on the roadmap. While Eidos Montreal stressed the plan is subject to change, the team has the next seven months mapped out (see sidebar). Each DLC release can be purchased individually, except for the final release. Unfortunately, only season pass holders can play Paradise Lost, which is disappointing since it has the most interesting premise. Regardless, if you're excited to spend more time in Lara Croft's boots, The Forge hits this month, and then you can expect new reasons to return to Shadow of the Tomb Raider for the subsequent six months. » **Brian Shea**



Most of the planned DLC tombs can be played cooperatively

The Road Ahead

Starting in November, each month will bring new DLC to Shadow of the Tomb Raider. While the first release may be out by the time you're reading this, Eidos Montreal outlined what to expect over the next six months.

December 2018: The Pillar
Players retrieve the Shield of the Age Maker and tackle a challenge tomb focused on hazardous winds.

January 2019: Devil Inside
Lara explores an area flooded with hallucinogenic gas that rewards her with an area-of-effect fear arrow.

February 2019: The Unwilling Savior
Discover more about Dr. Dominguez's backstory, including how and why he joined Trinity.

March 2019: The Serpent's Heart
After learning more about Dr. Dominguez in the last DLC, this release gives players a new look at the rebellion.

April 2019: The Grand Caiman
This release paints an ominous backdrop that something has awakened following the earthquake in San Juan.

May 2019: Paradise Lost
In this post-game DLC only available to season pass owners, you learn more about the mythical defenders of the Silver Box, as well as the missionary who discovered the Hidden City.

Underworld Ascendant

Using your wits to survive the Stygian Abyss

» **Platform**
PS4 • Xbox One
Switch • PC

» **Style**
1-Player Action

» **Publisher**
505 Games

» **Developer**
OtherSide Entertainment

» **Release**
November 15 (PC),
TBA (consoles)

A few months back we got our first glimpse of Underworld Ascendant's attempt to revitalize the immersive-sim genre that its predecessors, Ultima Underworld I and II, helped create. While the simple physics-based puzzles hinted at the underlying systems at play, many questions remained. Thankfully, our second trip into the Stygian Abyss provided a clearer picture of the emergent gameplay, progression, and player-driven experimentation Underworld Ascendant offers.

You play as the Avatar, a human transported to the Underworld to help save the fantasy dimension from a mythical creature called Typhon. Unfortunately, brawn alone won't save the day – to succeed where other adventurers have failed, you'll have to devise creative new solutions to the Underworld's myriad dangers.

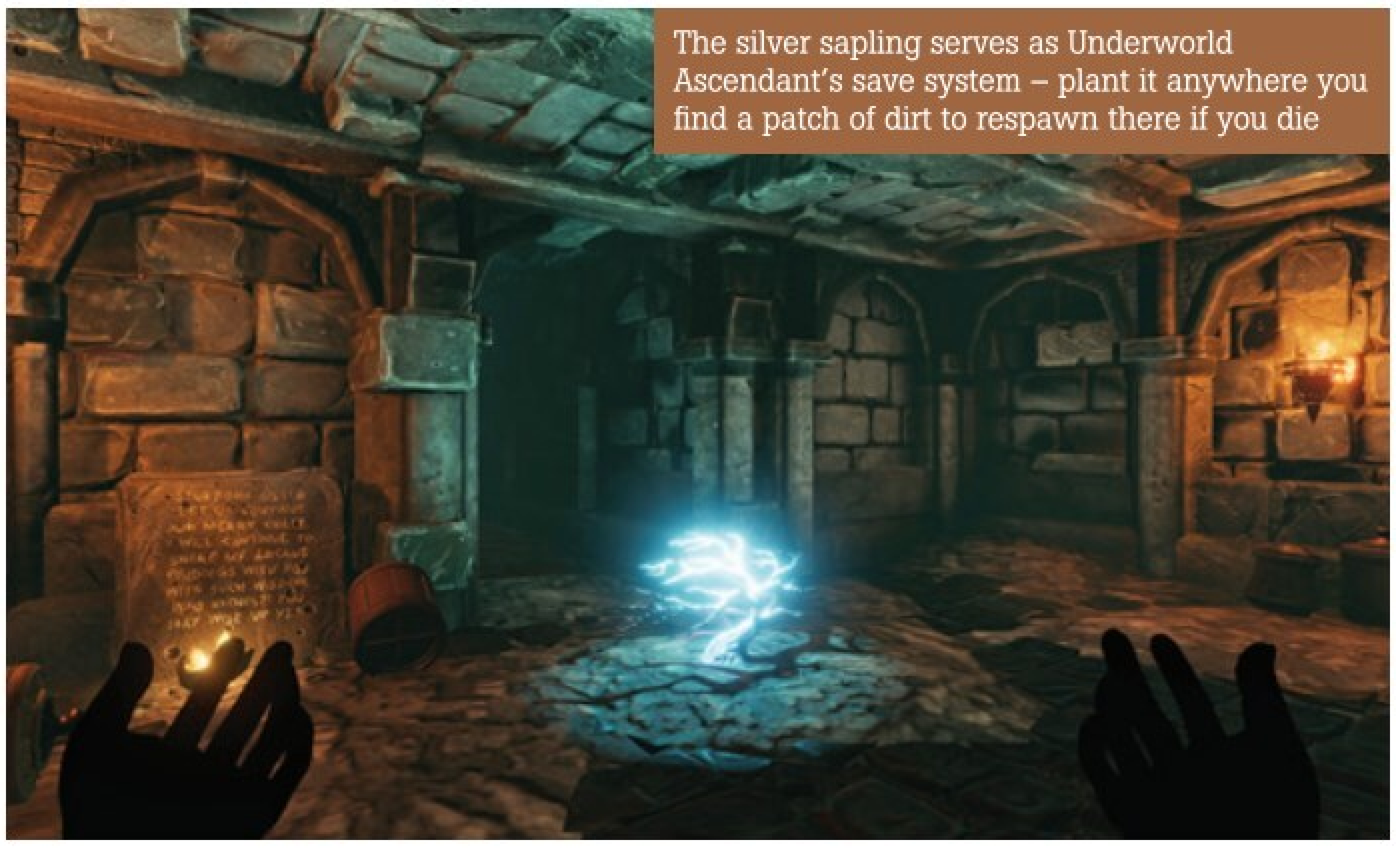
From a practical perspective, that means using your own custom combination of stealth, combat, and magic as you navigate Ascendant's atmospheric, puzzle-laden levels. I used water arrows to douse flames and sneak past skeleton guards, burned down a locked door by igniting a wooden chair in a nearby brazier and kicking it toward the obstruction, and used a "Move Wood" wand to levitate a crate I was standing on to an out-of-reach ledge. Why whack an enemy with a sword when you can bait a Deep Slug into its path with a piece of delicious fruit, then ignite its flammable ooze trail to burn your foe? That's not a rhetorical question – the answer is you'll earn more Memora from Ascendant's feat-based progression system for being creative, which can be spent to unlock new skills.

Player skills fall into the broad stealth, combat, and magic categories, but eschew simple stat boosts for new capabilities. Early unlocks include a meter that shows how hidden you are from enemies, or the ability to see floating mana pockets in levels, which replenish your magic bar when you enter them. Runes offer another unique form of non-linear progression. You find new rune words as you explore, like "create," "destroy," "heal," and "person." Once learned, you can mix and match words to create unique spells. "Heal person" replenishes your health, while "create person" summons an NPC outcast – who may not be thrilled with your decision to pull them into a deadly dungeon with you.

As you might guess, OtherSide Entertainment is striving to create levels that accommodate emergent gameplay and experimentation, and they won't remain static. The world continues to decay as Typhon's power grows, leading to new challenges and deadlier creatures when you return to previously explored environments. Thankfully, thorough exploration turns up a variety of weapons, armor, and items to aid you.

While I didn't discover any groundbreaking solutions to puzzles during my hands-on time, I was encouraged by the depth of the gameplay systems and the character of the environments – no surprise, given the team's experience working on games like Thief, System Shock, and BioShock Infinite. Whether you're new to the genre or an old Ultima Underworld wizard, you can begin experimenting with OtherSide's fantasy take on the immersive sim soon.

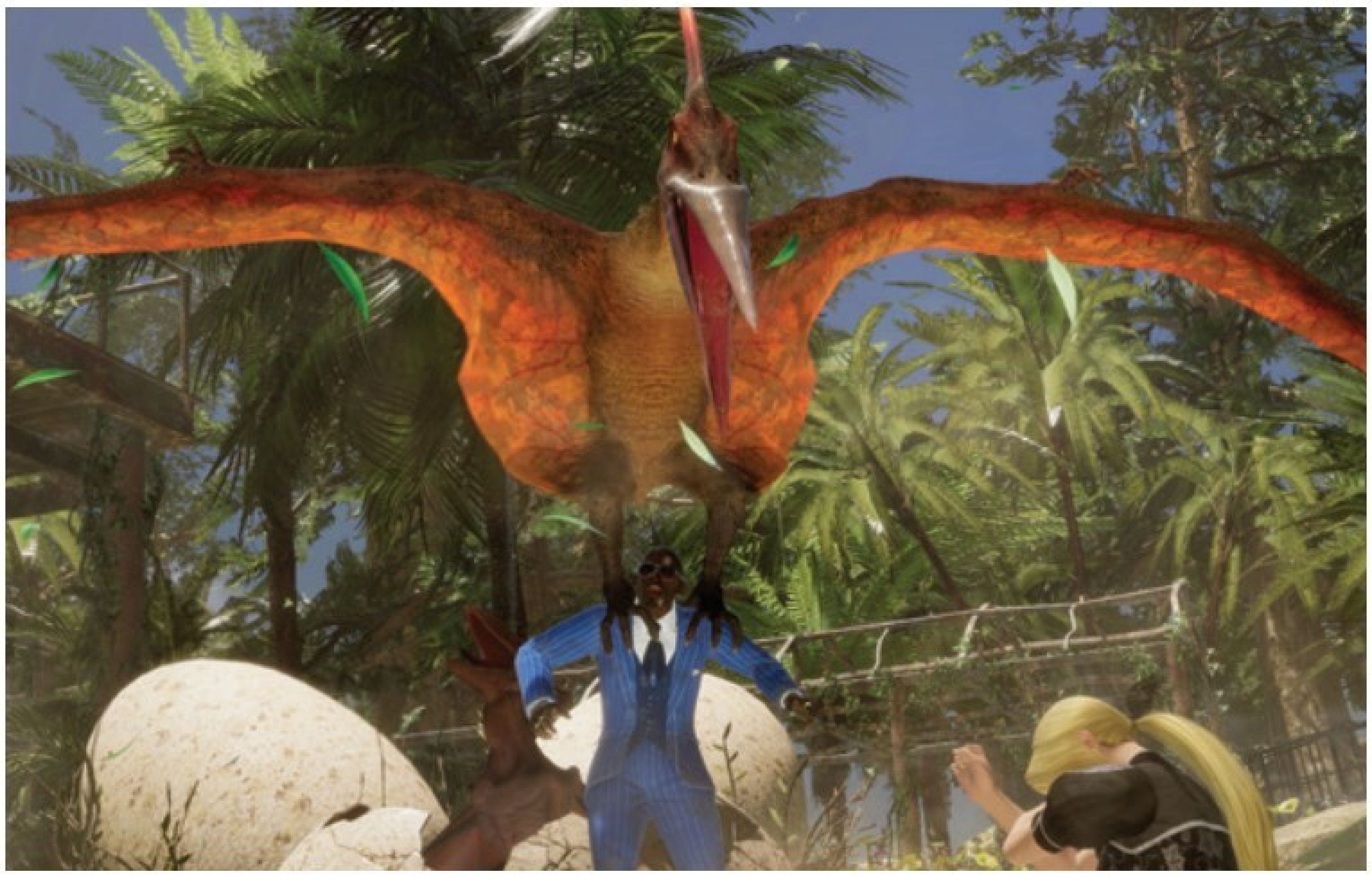
» **Jeff Marchiafava**



The silver sapling serves as Underworld Ascendant's save system – plant it anywhere you find a patch of dirt to respawn there if you die

Dead Or Alive 6

Sex appeal and grander ambitions



» Platform
PS4 • Xbox One • PC

» Style
1 or 2-Player Fighting (2-Player Online)

» Publisher
Koei Tecmo

» Developer
Team Ninja

» Release
February 15

From the recently released Soulcalibur VI to the upcoming Jump Force, Dead or Alive is up against a large swath of fighting game competition for its next numbered entry. The series is striving to find its footing on the competitive scene while retaining its offbeat and suggestive elements. With Dead or Alive 6 just a few months away, we sat down with director Yohei Shimbori to see the game in action and discuss what to expect from the latest entry.

Dead or Alive 6 uses a new engine, which Shimbori says allows the team to get more detailed with character models and environments. Fighters now have more facial animations and show sweat and bruises. As for the stages, they're getting more interactive in over-the-top and creative ways, including hazards. Dinosaurs are back in an arena that looks straight out of *Jurassic Park*; not only do you have to keep your eye on the fight at hand, but also watch out for pterodactyls swooping in and picking you up. Another stage embraces its pirate ship setting, complete with a kraken and plenty of explosives.

The roster is another major part of any fighting game, and longtime Dead or Alive fans will see returning characters like Tina, Bass, and Mila. So far the only new character to be revealed is street fighter Diego. He may fight rough with his powerful throws, but his backstory shows a kinder side: He's simply a man trying to help his mother out financially. When asked about roster balance, Shimbori confirmed the game features more female than male fighters. "This is because we've done some marketing research and we found that the series' fans are really looking forward to female characters. Part of our job is to please the fans so it will be [tilted] toward women," he says.

While fighters certainly have tamer options for costumes compared to past entries, Shimbori says the series isn't abandoning aspects like the famous breast jiggle that's been a part of the franchise since the first game. However, the team is making this more realistic, basing physics on movement and material type. Some costumes won't have any movement at all. "We're working within our fan expectations, and we do want to dispel any rumors that there is no movement whatsoever. That's been a misunderstanding," he explains.

Despite the game keeping its sex appeal, Shimbori is really hoping Dead or Alive 6 gets its due on the competitive scene, noting that Dead or Alive 5 Last Round was a good start for them with tournaments. "I think some people sort of look at the Dead or Alive series and don't think it's much of a competitive fighting game," he says. "With the addition of the new systems for 6, I think it really allows players to do deeper combos and have more options to do them. With pro players, they can really find their own way to excel or style to fight."

Time will tell if the fighter can have the best of both worlds, but from what we played, the game controlled well and we had a few laughs at the ridiculous stages and sassy character taunts. » **Kimberley Wallace**

Magic: The Gathering Arena

Deft digital dueling

» Platform
PC

» Style
2-Player Online Strategy

» Publisher
Wizards of the Coast

» Developer
Wizards of the Coast

» Release
TBA (Open beta available now)

Magic: The Gathering is no stranger to digital incarnations. The last decade has featured multiple offerings in the Duels franchise, designed to teach new players the game and give them a taste of what the longstanding physical collectible card game has to offer. Magic: The Gathering Arena embraces a free-to-play model, is developed by an in-house team, and stays true to the core game's roots.

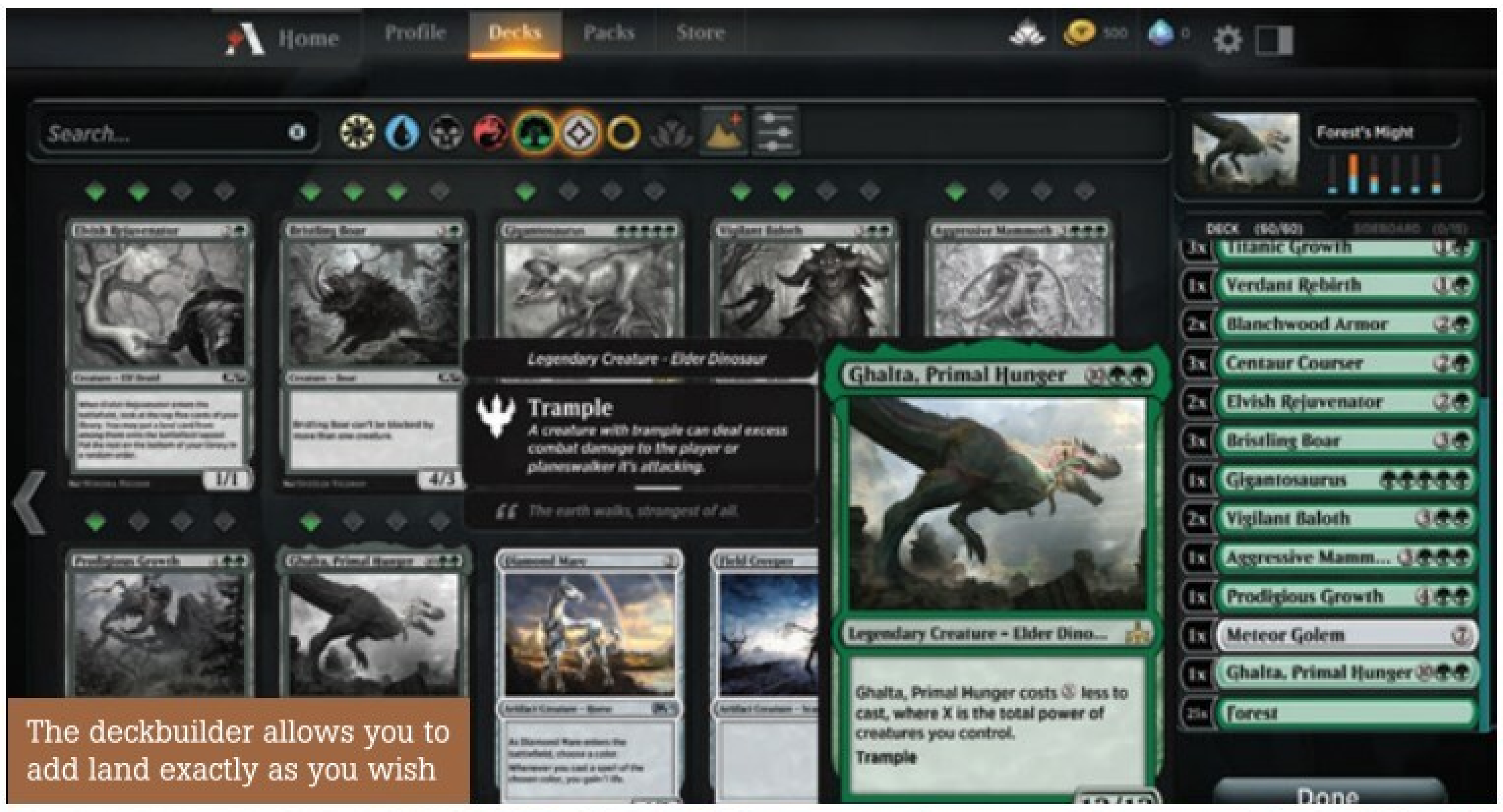
While all the features and mechanics are the same as its physical counterpart, acquisition of cards and available content are handled differently. Players can't trade, but they can acquire wild cards out of packs. You can turn in a wild card for any card you like of the associated rarity. This gives you some flexibility when you're trying to get a set of mythic rares to make your perfect deck; you don't have to crack packs forever hoping to complete a set you want. As you gain cards over the deck maximum of four, they contribute to a package that gives you a smattering of wild cards as well, meaning you'll keep growing your options as you play. Daily quests and incentives give players cards and currency that can be used to bolster their collection or enter tournaments.

Tournaments come in several flavors, some favoring casual players and others catering to competitive players. Rewards vary based on the event, but generally higher fees and bigger rewards are the norm for competitive play. In addition to offering casual and competitive constructed and draft play, Arena features rotating events that keep things fresh, like singleton (only one of any card is allowed in a deck) or Momir Vig (where players create random creatures from pools of mana). These events are expected to continue offering zany, fun formats that shake up the game and play far differently than the accepted metagame.

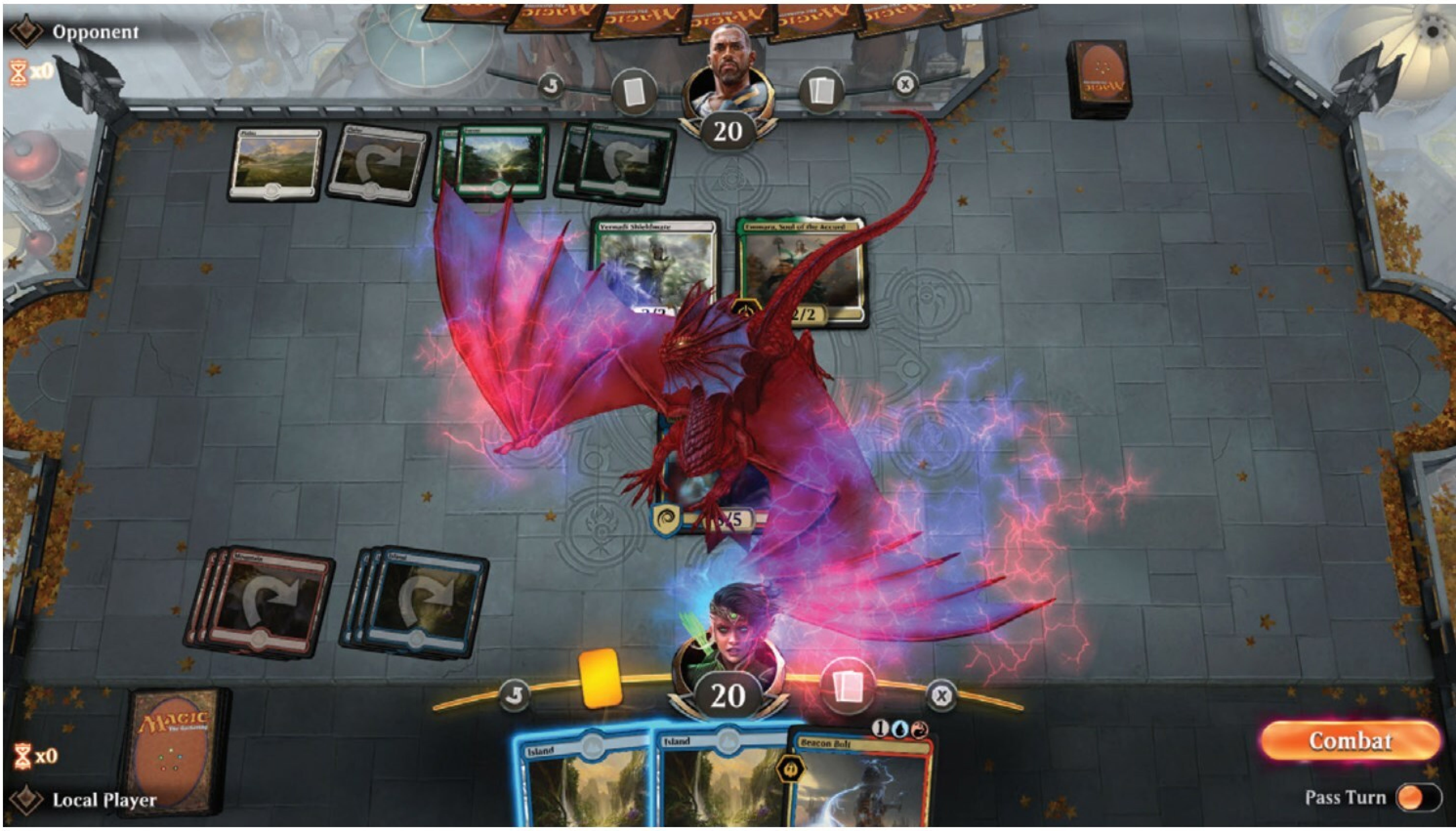
As the game continues through open beta, players are expected to be able to link up and play with friends – an option that's not currently available but is expected soon. Arena is also incentivizing players to come check out the game by offering some sets and events, like the Guilds of Ravnica, before they appear in the world of physical cards.

I've been a fan of Magic: The Gathering since Revised landed in my local hobby shop almost 25 years ago, and Arena shows a ton of promise. I'll be slinging spells and buffing birds all the way to launch.

» **Daniel Tack**


Home
Profile
Decks
Packs
Store
Search...
Forest's Might
Trample
A creature with trample can deal excess combat damage to the player or planeswalker it's attacking.
Ghalta, Primal Hunger
Titanic Growth
Verdant Rebirth
Blanchwood Armor
Centaur Courser
Elvish Rejuvenator
Bristling Boar
Gigantosaurus
Vigilant Baloth
Aggressive Mamm...
Prodigious Growth
Meteor Golem
Forest
Done

The deckbuilder allows you to add land exactly as you wish


Opponent
x0
20
20
x0
Local Player
Combat
Pass Turn

Pathologic 2

Return of the plague

The original Pathologic, released back in 2005 by Russian developer Ice-Pick Lodge, is easily one of the strangest games ever made. Playing as three characters in a small plague-infested town, you worked to combat the illness and save the village – or maybe you didn't. Pathologic, as rickety and broken as it was, attracted a cult following due to its unusual, open systems, with a strict time limit erasing the quests you haven't completed by the end of a day, as well as a fluctuating economy that affected items you could buy. Moreover, NPCs could die from the plague (or by your own hand), leaving you without vital clues to solve the mystery of the plague. The game's technical and localization issues kept it from reaching a wide audience, but more than a decade later, Ice Pick Lodge has returned to the scene of the crime and is making a go of helping its cult classic live up to its potential.

The confusingly named Pathologic 2 isn't a sequel but a full-on remake of the original game, with modern-generation graphics and better localization. The basics are still the same: You have 12 days to survive the plague and hopefully figure out how to stop it. However, surviving isn't going to be easy. You'll have to loot, mug, steal, and maybe even beg for resources to stay healthy and sane. Your main goal is to keep your frail body, wracked by hunger and exhaustion, away from harm and sickness. Allying with other villagers may give you a fighting chance or an opportunity for them to stab you in the back.

Pathologic 2 recently released an alpha to the public, and it appears to be shaping up quite nicely, with the cumbersome inventory and map interfaces being streamlined as well as a notable upgrade in graphic textures. The world's combination of gray and wheat amber overtones still remains, making Pathologic 2 one of the most unique-looking games out there. Its eeriness has also been retained, with creepy hallways leading into darkness, massive structures towering in the middle of nowhere, and NPCs that include strange creatures and villagers at death's door.

As someone who was entranced by the original in spite of how broken it was, Pathologic 2 is easily one of my most anticipated games. Ice-Pick Lodge's remake doesn't have a release date yet, but all the progress thus far has demonstrated that the exceptional promise of the original might finally get the game it has always deserved thanks to a bucket of polish and smart interface tweaks. Hopefully everything comes together to deliver the best version of this strange but tantalizing fever dream.
» **Javy Gwaltney**

» Platform
PS4 • Xbox One • PC

» Style
1-Player Adventure

» Publisher
Tinybuild

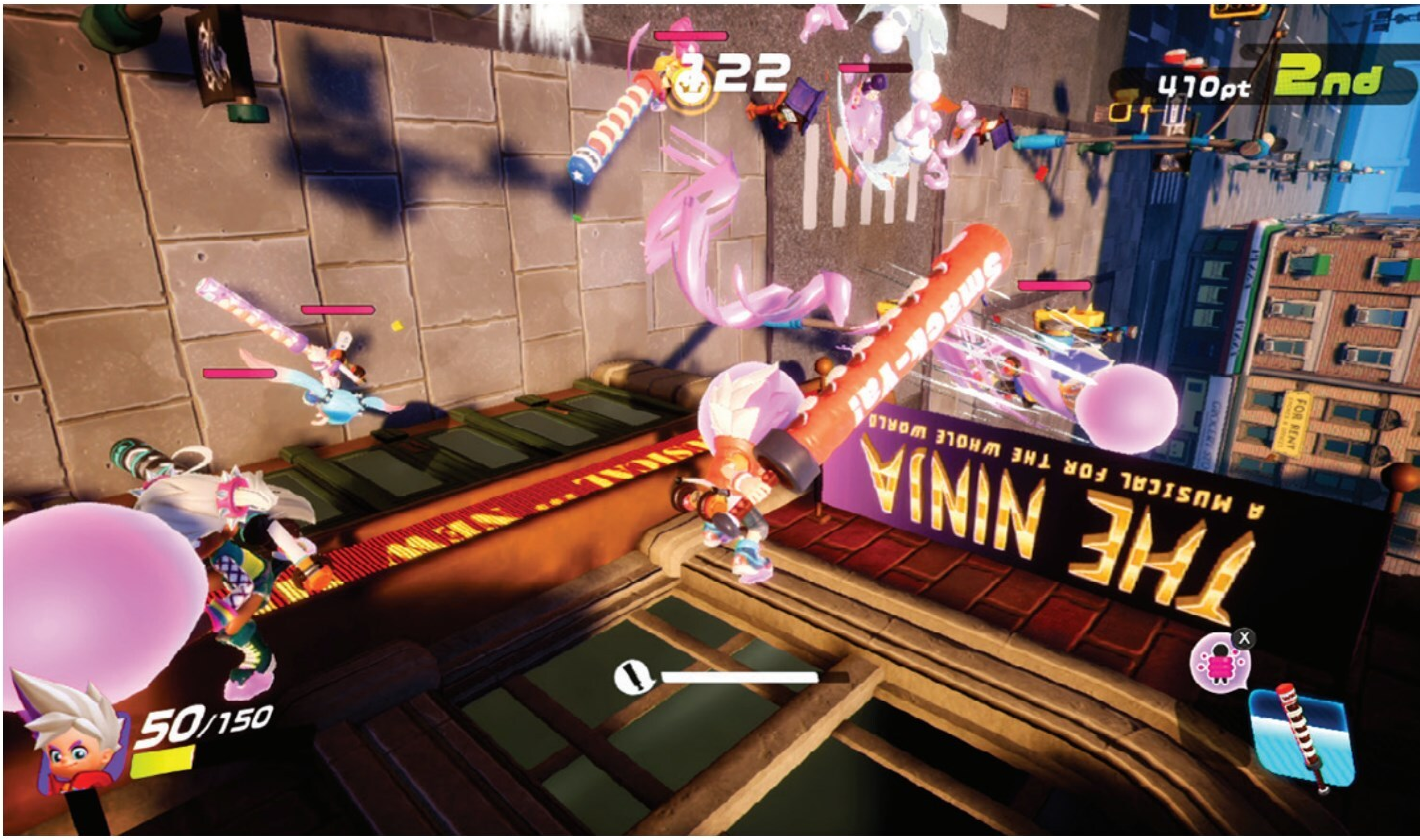
» Developer
Ice-Pick Lodge

» Release
TBA

Every NPC you come across has the potential to be an ally…or a backstabber

Ninjala

Bubble gum weapons and chaos



» Platform
Switch

» Style
1-Player Action
(8-Player Online)

» Publisher
GungHo Online
Entertainment

» Developer
GungHo Online
Entertainment

» Release
Spring

GungHo has made a name for itself with the Puzzle and Dragons series, and more recently the free-to-play Let It Die. Its next project is a multiplayer action game that taps into the signature GungHo humor.

Ninjala offers two different modes: battle royale and team versus. Players are unleashed onto stages based on different countries and must earn points by fighting other players, collecting items, and performing special moves. You have your choice of a weapon, from baseball bats to yo-yos to dole out damage, but your true secret weapon is bubble gum.

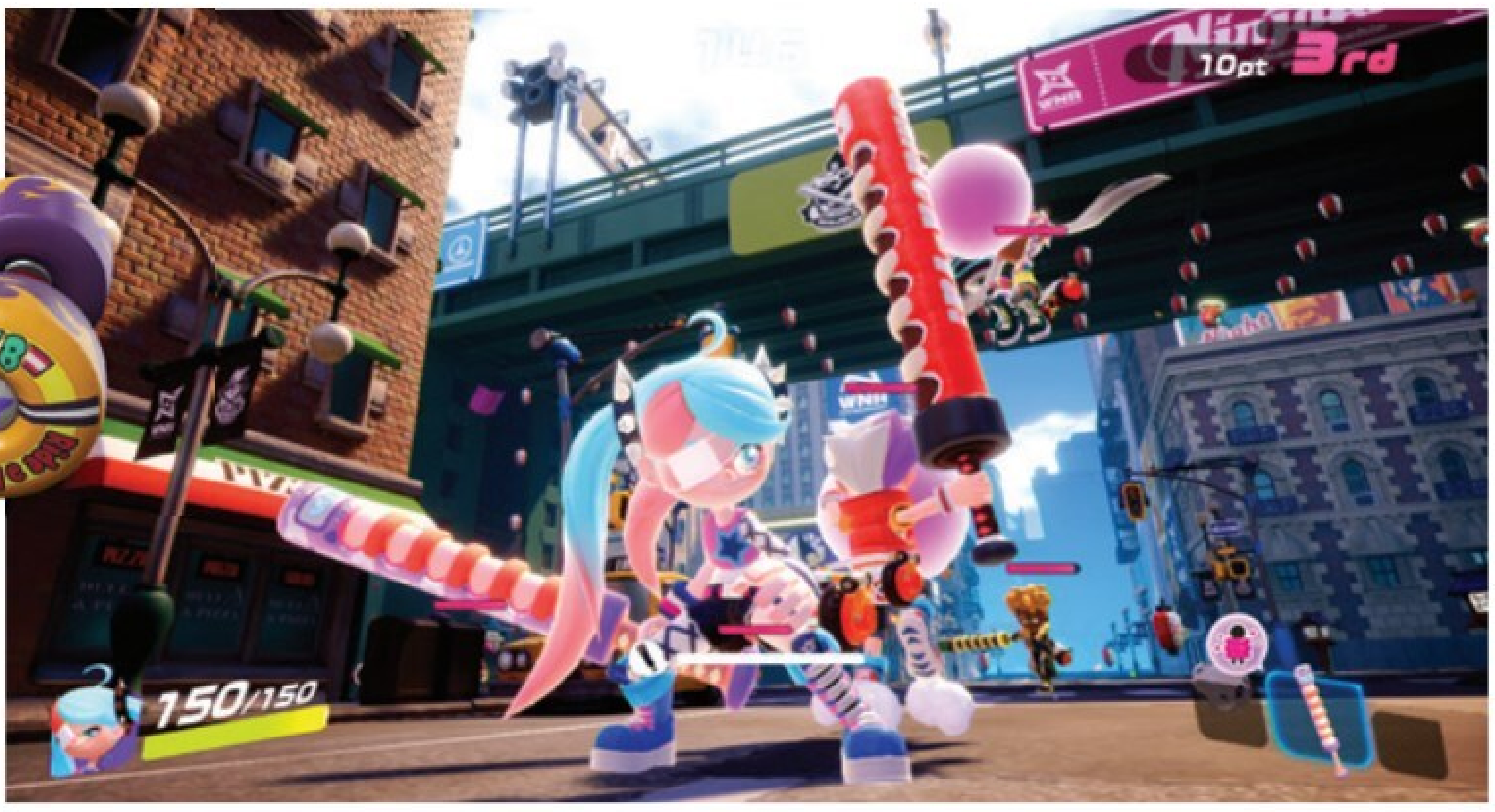
You blow bubbles to change the size of your weapon, but you can also toss them at opponents and trap them. The game becomes about constantly assessing the risk versus reward; blowing a big bubble takes time, leaving you vulnerable to enemy attacks, but it also creates a much more powerful weapon or greater chance of trapping an enemy in its stickiness. Blowing bubbles also allows you to climb up surfaces to get the jump on opponents or find hard-to-reach items.

Kills aren't the only thing that matter at the end of matches. Scoring the most Ippons (a powerful takedown, with its name coming from Judo), destroying the most robot drones, or completing your secret mission assigned at the beginning of a match also gives you points. While the developers are mostly mum about specific mission objectives, they could be things like breaking 20 lanterns, or not defeating any foes.

Ninjala features eight pre-set avatars, with plenty of customization options available. New hair colors, eye colors, skin tones, and outfits are available for unlock. However, GungHo was not ready to talk about how these will be unlocked or the economy surrounding the game. The company hasn't even revealed whether the game will be free-to-play like many of its other titles, or if it will be a packaged product.

While GungHo couldn't answer every question, it did say the core of the game will come down to customizing your player with different ninja gum, specifically deciding what is best to bring into the fight, and the opportune time to use it. Our hands-on session proved a lot of fun, but time will tell if Ninjala has the variety and depth to ensure a long shelf life.

» **Kimberley Wallace**



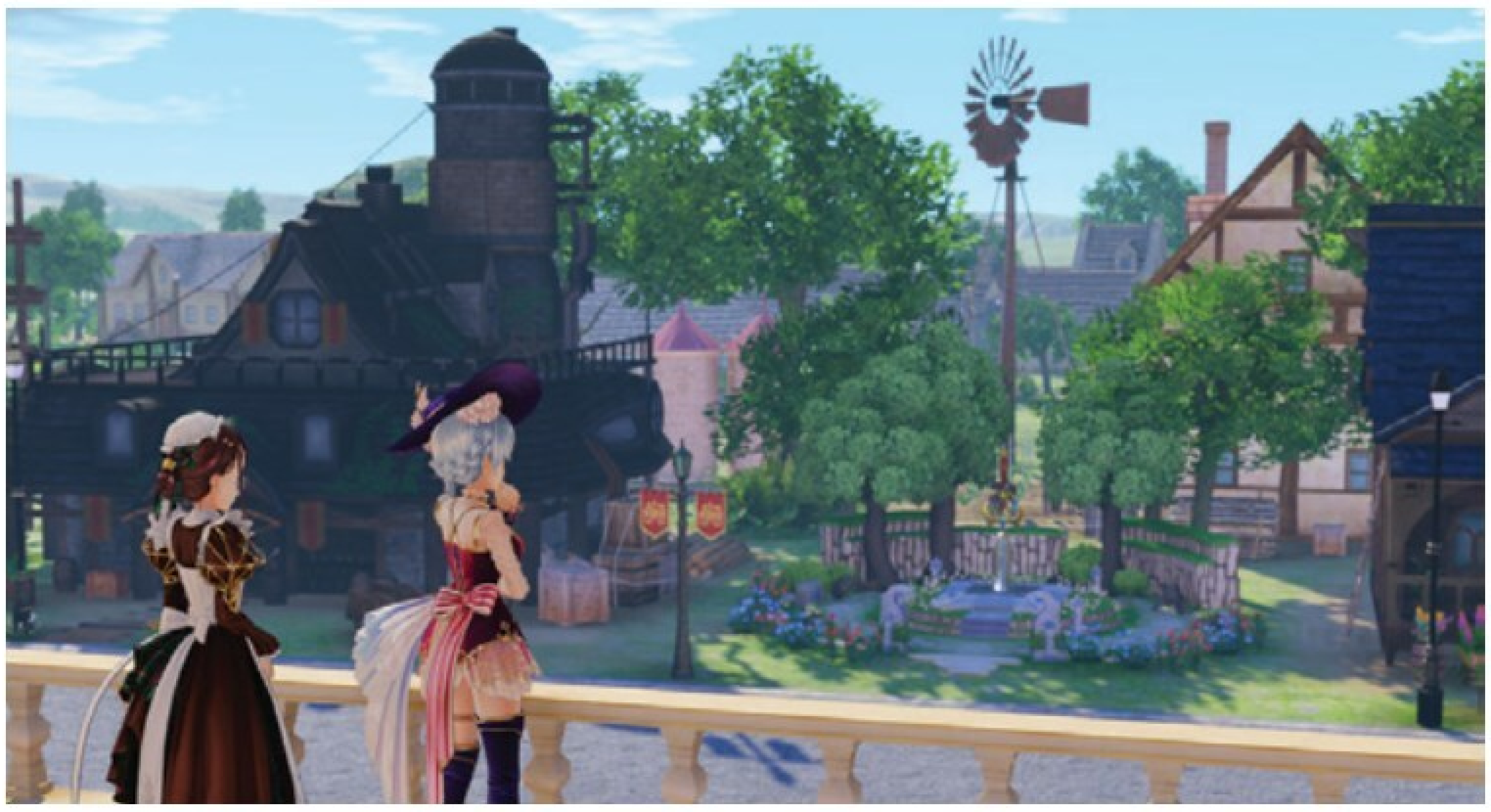
Nelke & The Legendary Alchemists: Ateliers Of The New World

A celebration of alchemists

Up until now, we've always controlled an alchemist in Gust's long-running Atelier series. For its 20th anniversary, things are about to change. In the latest side entry, you are the new governor of a struggling town and your focus is on rebuilding it to greater heights. This entails deciding where to place shops, landmarks, roads, and more to attract people to your growing locale. That doesn't mean the game is devoid of alchemy, though. You brush shoulders with beloved alchemists from the entirety of the series' run, which first made its debut in Japan back in 1997 with Atelier Marie.

Alchemists from past games are on hand to make items for Nelke as long she assigns them to do so. Expect stalwarts from early on in the series like Marie to more recent item-crafters such as Sophie. Seeing all these alchemists interact is the highlight, and you can also bring them into battle. The game still uses its tried-and-true turn-based battle system, but it's simpler than previous entries, though you'll still have powers and items to factor into battle. "It's more about the town building," says producer Keisuke Kikuchi. "We're not doing too much with the battle system this time around; it's more supplementing the game than the essence of it."

After getting our hands on the game, it's clear the true allure is micromanaging your town right down to what role these legendary alchemists play, as you assign them tasks, alchemy recipes, and to run shops based on who you think is the best fit. Do your job right and your rewards will be seen in your spending budget, bringing new faces into your town, and gaining access to travel to new places. A shift in focus could just be the fun shake-up the series needs. » **Kimberley Wallace**



» **Platform**
PS4 • Switch • PC

» **Style**
1-Player Role-Playing

» **Publisher**
Koei Tecmo

» **Developer**
Gust

» **Release**
Early 2019

GameStop
POWERUP
REWARDS™

REWARDS CENTER

GIFT CARD
$50
PlayStation Store
All the Entertainment.
All the Adventure. Always On
Download the latest games and add-ons, watch movies, and more from your PlayStation 4 system
Nintendo eShop
For use on Nintendo systems*
$20
Nintendo
Microsoft
$25
XBOX
Gift Card
Buy games, movies, TV, music, apps and more on Xbox and Windows.*

GIFTS THAT GO EVEN FURTHER

Use your PowerUp rewards certificates in store or online to get digital currency or gift cards from the hottest brands.

Redeem points for rewards certificates today at **www.PowerUpRewards.com** or in the GameStop app.

reviews

gameinformer GAME OF THE MONTH

78 Red Dead Redemption II

Rockstar Games has done it again. Following in the impossible footsteps of Grand Theft Auto V, Red Dead Redemption II is a sprawling Western that deepens the tragic tale of the Van der Linde gang and again raises the bar for open-world game design. This is one you won't want to miss.

THE SCORING SYSTEM

10	Outstanding. A truly elite title that is nearly perfect in every way. This score is given out rarely and indicates a game that cannot be missed.	5	Flawed. It may be obvious that the game has lots of potential, but its most engaging features could be undeniably flawed or not integrated into the experience.
9	Superb. Just shy of gaming nirvana, this score is a high recommendation because the game reviewed is head-and-shoulders above its competition.	4	Bad. While some things work as planned, the majority of this title either malfunctions or it is so dull that the game falls short as a whole.
8	Very Good. Innovative, but perhaps not the right choice for everyone. This score indicates that there are many good things to be had, but arguably so.	3	Painful. If there is anything that's redeeming in a game of this caliber, it's buried beneath agonizing gameplay and uneven execution in its features or theme.
7	Average. The game's features may work, but are nothing that even casual players haven't seen before. A decent game from beginning to end.	2	Broken. Basically unplayable. This game is so insufficient in execution that any value would be derived in extremely small quantities, if at all.
6	Limited Appeal. Although there may be fans of games receiving this score, many will be left yearning for a more rewarding game experience.	1	Apologizing for the bugs in your game before it comes out.

AWARDS

gameinformer PLATINUM	Awarded to games that score between 9.75 and 10
gameinformer GOLD	Awarded to games that score between 9 and 9.5
gameinformer SILVER	Awarded to games that score between 8.5 and 8.75
gameinformer GAME OF THE MONTH	The award for the most outstanding game in the issue

For more information on the age classification ratings in our reviews, head to gameinformer.com/ratings

Search GameStop
9.5 gameinformer GOLD
CALL OF DUTY
BLACK OPS
IIII
NOW AVAILABLE
PICK UP IN STORE TODAY
SHOP NOW
Home
Shop
Trade
Stores
Rewards

Put shopping time on your time.

Do your holiday shopping anywhere, anytime with the GameStop app and pick up at a store or have purchases shipped to you.

The things you can do with the GameStop app.

Download today from the App Store or Google Play.

GameStop
POWER TO THE PLAYERS®

Red Dead Redemption II

An open-world Western for the ages

10

game informer GAME OF THE MONTH

game informer PLATINUM

Style 1-Player Action **Publisher** Rockstar Games **Developer** Rockstar Games **Release** October 26 **Rating** M

PS4 • Xbox One

» Concept
Ride shotgun as the infamous Van der Linde gang tears itself apart in the most vibrant open world in video games

» Graphics
From the Albert Bierstadt-inspired Western vistas to the bustling streets of a New Orleans facsimile, this is one of the most beautiful games ever created. The uncompromising attention to detail Rockstar exercised in recreating this historical period is astonishing

» Sound
Strong voice acting keeps the story grounded, ambient sounds in the wilderness help make the countryside feel alive, the gorgeous soundtrack leverages elements from early American folk to bring authenticity to the world

» Playability
The horse-riding and gunplay are both improved from Red Dead Redemption. It may sound annoying, but the several new mechanics that require you to care for yourself, your horse, and your weaponry impart a sense of realism that grounds the experience

» Entertainment
Rockstar has once again created a game that redefines the open-world experience. Red Dead Redemption II is a triumph that every gamer should experience for themselves

» Replay Value
High

The world of Red Dead Redemption II is defined by violence, both in its passive and active forms. Bandits roam the highways, pilfering from the wealthy and poor alike. Predators mercilessly hunt and kill their prey in the unforgiving wilderness. Men of industry don't blink twice stepping over the bodies of the sick and the dead to realize their economic ambitions. In this primordial stew of fear and savagery, the outlaw Van der Linde gang feels right at home.

Led by the charismatic and resourceful Dutch van der Linde, this gang doesn't think of itself as part of the problem. They support each other, primarily rob from the greed-lined pockets of the rich, and share the pioneer goal of buying a remote piece of land and settling down together far from the freedom-crushing existence of society. But as power structures shift and the unrelenting progress of government and technology swallow the untamed West, their particular sort of violence is speeding toward extinction.

If you've played Red Dead Redemption, you already know how this tragic story ends. But watching the fabric that holds the gang together fray and unravel as the law chases them across the country over the course of Red Dead Redemption II is riveting nonetheless. Once-vibrant camp nights filled with campfire songs and revelry are slowly replaced by suffocating discontent. Rival factions develop among the gang, and watching Dutch van der Linde transition from a relatively principled leader to an unhinged psychopath is one of the most vivid and raw portraits of villainy I've seen.

Standing in the center of this savage storm is Arthur Morgan, Dutch's righthand man. His gruff exterior and icy stare paint the picture of the prototypical outlaw, but underneath this gunslinger veneer is a reflective man struggling with his own mortality and the wayward morality of the gang's increasingly desperate actions. He still feels more at home among thieves, liars, and murderers than he does with honest civilians, but he increasingly contemplates the real cost of their heinous actions. Player actions determine which of four ways Morgan's character arc ends, but regardless of your decisions, his intimate struggle with the life he chose serves as the questioning heart of this epic Western experience.

Using the word "epic" to describe Red Dead Redemption II feels understated. This is the biggest and most cohesive adventure Rockstar Games has ever created. A rare harmony exists between the narrative, gameplay systems, open world, and mission design. Their interdependent nature makes it tough to talk at any length about each individual element without venturing into spoiler territory; the fashion in which these elements mingle and coalesce over the course of the journey is interesting to witness.

Just the main story missions will likely take you 80-plus hours to complete. Surprisingly for a game of this length, Red Dead Redemption II only occasionally succumbs to repetition or boredom – primarily due to restrictions with when and where you can fast travel. As the gang is chased across the land by law, rival gangs, and the Pinkerton agency, Rockstar crafts a healthy diversity of settings. By the time you hang up your spurs, you will have robbed small-town banks, hijacked trains, executed jailbreaks, clashed with organized crime outfits, and challenged titans of industry. Sometimes you ride with the entire gang, other times the action revolves around only a few key actors, giving Rockstar time to flesh out Morgan's compatriots. This includes getting to know Red Dead Redemption protagonist John Marston even better. Each gang member brings something unique to the table and most are likeable, which gives the inevitable dissolution of their alliances a tragic weight.

Arthur Morgan's struggle with his life choices as the gang falls apart serves as the heart of the narrative

Violence is the only currency that holds value across all the regions Arthur Morgan and the Van der Linde gang traverse, so Red Dead Redemption II rarely leaves the comfort of wanton bloodshed, perhaps to a fault. That's not to say the combat isn't fun (it is), but it feels refreshing whenever Rockstar lets a mission play out without resorting to violent encounters, and I wish there were more quiet moments sprinkled throughout the story. The world is vibrant enough to sustain long sections where every mission doesn't devolve into gunfights.

Going back to other open-world games after playing Red Dead Redemption II won't be easy; this is unequivocally the most well-crafted and fully realized open world in video games. The attention to detail Rockstar poured into creating this bloody interpretation of a historical period is remarkable. The wide expanses of wilderness feel alive thanks to an unrivaled dynamic weather system, ambient sound effects, and the most ambitious ecology of flora and fauna ever seen in games. You can spend hundreds of hours exploring the varied and gorgeous terrain, and Rockstar packs the game with side objectives to keep you busy. Hunting legendary animals, collecting plants for the crafting system, and exploring for dinosaur bones will keep you occupied on the frontier. Some of the best moments occur when you stumble onto a remote property and meet the colorful (and sometimes revolting) humans who call it home.

When you head into town, Rockstar's meticulous craftsmanship gets even more impressive. Each of the many towns and cities has its own character and personality, with the bustling New Orleans facsimile Saint Denis being the crown jewel. The cities are packed with things to do, from taking in a vaudeville show and getting your photo taken to meeting a memorable cast of strangers and perusing the intricately detailed shops. You can dive into a catalogue at gun shops and general stores, or walk right up to the shelves and grab what you need. All the exteriors and interiors in the game look authentic to the time period and make you feel like you are visiting a place lost in time. Even the civilian population is remarkable – you can interact with each person you come across, and I rarely heard a repeated line of dialogue apart from some random encounters outside the city. New strangers continually pop up offering interesting side missions as well.

Rockstar Games has outdone itself again with Red Dead Redemption II. The up-close portrayal of the outlaw Van der Linde gang's unraveling is a compelling companion story that blends seamlessly with the original game, and the depth and breadth of the open world is a technical triumph that every gamer should experience.
» **Matt Bertz**

The diverse geography includes snowy mountains, humid swamps, and everything in between

Call Of Duty: Black Ops 4

Treyarch's gambit yields big rewards

9.5

gameinformer GOLD

Style 1 to 88-Player Online Shooter **Publisher** Activision **Developer** Treyarch **Release** October 12 **Rating** M

PS4 • Xbox One • PC

» Concept
Take on other players in a variety of multiplayer modes, co-op zombies encounters, or battle royale

» Graphics
Blackout's environments draw from the very best of Treyarch's Call of Duty games, and zombies opts for a more surreal, arcade look. It all works

» Sound
Footsteps identify when other players are around, and contextual callouts in zombies mode let you know what's important even if you're not on voice chat

» Playability
With modes and settings for everyone (except single-player fans), there's no barrier to diving right into the fray if you're willing to play online with others

» Entertainment
Whatever you're looking for in your online shooter, Black Ops 4 offers an impressive, highly enjoyable content suite that should keep you coming back for more

» Replay Value
High

Every year, the unceasing refrain that Call of Duty is the same gets repeated like a dogmatic mantra. With Call of Duty: Black Ops 4, Treyarch takes a big risk in removing a franchise staple – the single-player campaign – and embraces nothing but online multiplayer. The gamble pays off, as the title features more modes, settings, and ways to engage than any game in the series I can recall. The blazing new Blackout mode steals the zeitgeist of the battle royale's thunder, packaging it in a polished, powerful entry to the burgeoning genre. If you're willing to eschew single-player completely, the payoff is worth it.

While the other modes are great and could easily carry the title on their own, the unquestionable star of the show is Blackout, Call of Duty's first foray into the battle-royale space. The pacing of the experience is almost perfect, with a lot less foraging and a lot more action thanks to a map size that facilitates a focus on fighting. Moments where you're running around in the doldrums of fields, rocks, and trees without enemy contact are few and far between. Intense conflict is incentivized with supply drops and mystery boxes. To get the best weapons you often need to take on A.I. zombies, creating enjoyable risk-reward situations that must continually be weighed. Epic encounters are constant, from intense helicopter assaults that often end in fiery wrecks to cargo-truck supply-drop steals. Using tools from the traditional multiplayer modes, like the grapple gun or combat hatchet, is a joy, and even if you end up being a victim during an action-packed drop in the first moments of a match, the next is only moments away. You can play this mode solo, but it really sizzles in four-player squads with your friends.

Zombies mode is more expansive than ever, with three different cooperative experiences available (four if you have the season pass) and a slew of dials to turn, allowing players to create a tuned challenge to exacting specifications and modifiers. Players lamenting the absence of a campaign may find story-driven solace here, with each immersive and arcade-like scenario delving into the depths of horror and the occult. Weaving around environments pulled from Roman, Norse, Egyptian, and Celtic mythology in the time-twisting IX or searching the depths of a sinking Titanic in Voyage of Despair, zombies has tales to tell betwixt each wave. Secrets abound, but new interactions like banging on gongs to summon challenging champions in the depths under the arena or attempting to swim your way to the submerged rooms of the sinking ship provide interesting fare for all styles. Not only can you turn the dials to handcraft a zombie expedition to exacting specifications, but the character unlocks and progression are expansive as well, allowing made-to-order loadouts. Powerful talismans even allow you to break the rules, like starting a match off with an assault rifle. With engaging characters, bizarre stories, and copious customization options, zombies is the best it has ever been.

Traditional multiplayer has been tweaked a bit, but the boots-on-the-ground solid shooting and scooting is rooted in classic Call of Duty. Players have a bit more health, an active heal, and additional incentives to embrace teamplay over simple kill-death-assist metrics, but the core is satisfying, fast, and fluid. The Counter-Strike-inspired Heist mode gives something a little different, as you purchase weapons and accessories each round for a single spawn. Still, the franchise underpinnings remain strong, even if they don't reinvent the rifle. Those looking to prestige and explore new weapons, abilities, and operator mods have a large array of options.

Call of Duty: Black Ops 4 makes a sacrifice that's sure to be off-putting to some with the lack of a campaign, but the surrender of tradition comes with sweeping and significant benefits. Blackout is the best battle-royale experience available today, zombies offers crazy customizable co-op, and multiplayer keeps things grounded for those looking for the classic core.

» Daniel Tack

DEL TUNNELS

Assassin's Creed Odyssey

Fighting for glory

Style 1-Player Action/Role-Playing **Publisher** Ubisoft **Developer** Ubisoft Quebec **Release** October 5 **Rating** M

Many mythological traditions involve some form of demigod, an exceptional individual born from the union of a human and a deity. These heroes accomplish astounding things thanks to their divine heritage, but their mortal sides keep them from joining the ranks of true gods. Assassin's Creed Odyssey exists in the same place between two realms. With vast improvements to combat and progression, no other Assassin's Creed had made players feel this capable and powerful. However, Odyssey struggles to find appropriate ways to exercise that power, presenting a vision of Ancient Greece that relies more on familiar routine than legendary feats.

Though it won't be the subject of any epic poems, I still appreciate Odyssey's incredible ambition. The team at Ubisoft Quebec built an immense open world full of towering statues and gorgeous landscapes that serve as a vivid backdrop for your quest. After choosing either Kassandra or Alexios as your protagonist (I prefer Kassandra's voice performer), you set out on a journey that pits you against nations, cultists, and monsters. The new hero has a likeable confidence, and I enjoyed making choices and watching the consequences unfold, but the pacing is infuriating. Despite doing plenty of side quests, I often had to grind or complete a series of barely related tasks to advance the story. That drip-feed pattern over 50-plus hours puts a serious damper on the momentum.

Odyssey's setting is new, but the gameplay builds on the foundation laid by Assassin's Creed Origins last year, expanding the RPG systems and adding several new features. Melee combat is the most rewarding distillation of that process; encounters are a ballet of attacks and abilities punctuated by dodges and parries. As you fight, you build adrenaline to expend on a wide array of powers. Set your blades on fire, then slow time and attack multiple soldiers to engulf them in flames. Send a lieutenant in to distract a bandit while you take aim with a poison arrow. These abilities and more convey a dynamic and godlike sense of power, with a blend of action and reaction that creates my favorite combat system in the series.

Naval gameplay returns in Odyssey in its most full-featured incarnation since Black Flag and Rogue. You can upgrade your ship, find sunken ruins, and hunt down pirates. It all works well and provides simple fun, but Odyssey doesn't give you much incentive to go sailing. The naval encounters aren't complex enough to be gratifying, and the rewards aren't good enough to be enticing. Though I enjoyed the lovely views from my ship and the occasional exchange of fiery arrows, the naval component ends up feeling inconsequential beyond its function as transportation.

One of Odyssey's signature features is mercenaries – roaming warriors that present more challenge than average soldiers. They are like the Phylakes from Origins, but infinite in number, and you climb their ranks as you defeat them. Seeking these encounters pays off because you get decent rewards for killing mercenaries, but that doesn't always happen on your terms. Mercenaries hunt you down, which can lead to improvised encounters that make great water-cooler moments. But the system creates just as many annoying scenarios, like an angry mercenary standing right next to the person you need for a quest. Attracting many mercenaries' attention when you're trying to do something delicate is also a pain, and getting them off your back is a hassle.

The volatility of the mercenary system is a symptom of a bigger problem: the rarity of deliberately crafted gameplay. The game doesn't have a shortage of content; I enjoyed clearing camps and waging war, but I was hungry for more scenarios that felt more carefully designed. Instead, Odyssey feels like an ecosystem set up and left to run on its own with little authorial interference. Too many quests send you sneaking around to loot chests, burn war supplies, or kill specific targets. With some notable exceptions, even the main story missions and key assassinations rely on these tasks, so your actions during major beats don't feel distinct or special compared to the rest of the experience. This repetition and predictability drain some glory from activities that are fun in isolation.

Assassin's Creed Odyssey aims high in its attempts to blend innovative additions with returning features. The execution might be uneven, but Ubisoft Quebec ultimately strikes a successful balance among the many parts. The story is compelling, both as a hero's journey and in the way it ties into the series' wider lore. Exploring the world is fun, combat is empowering, and getting epic loot is a thrill. That solid core formula carries Odyssey a long way, but like Icarus and his wax wings, it's not enough to reach the bright star on the horizon. » **Joe Juba**

8.25

PS4 • Xbox One • PC

» Concept
Uncover a conspiracy, sail the sea, and forge a new hero in a massive journey through Ancient Greece

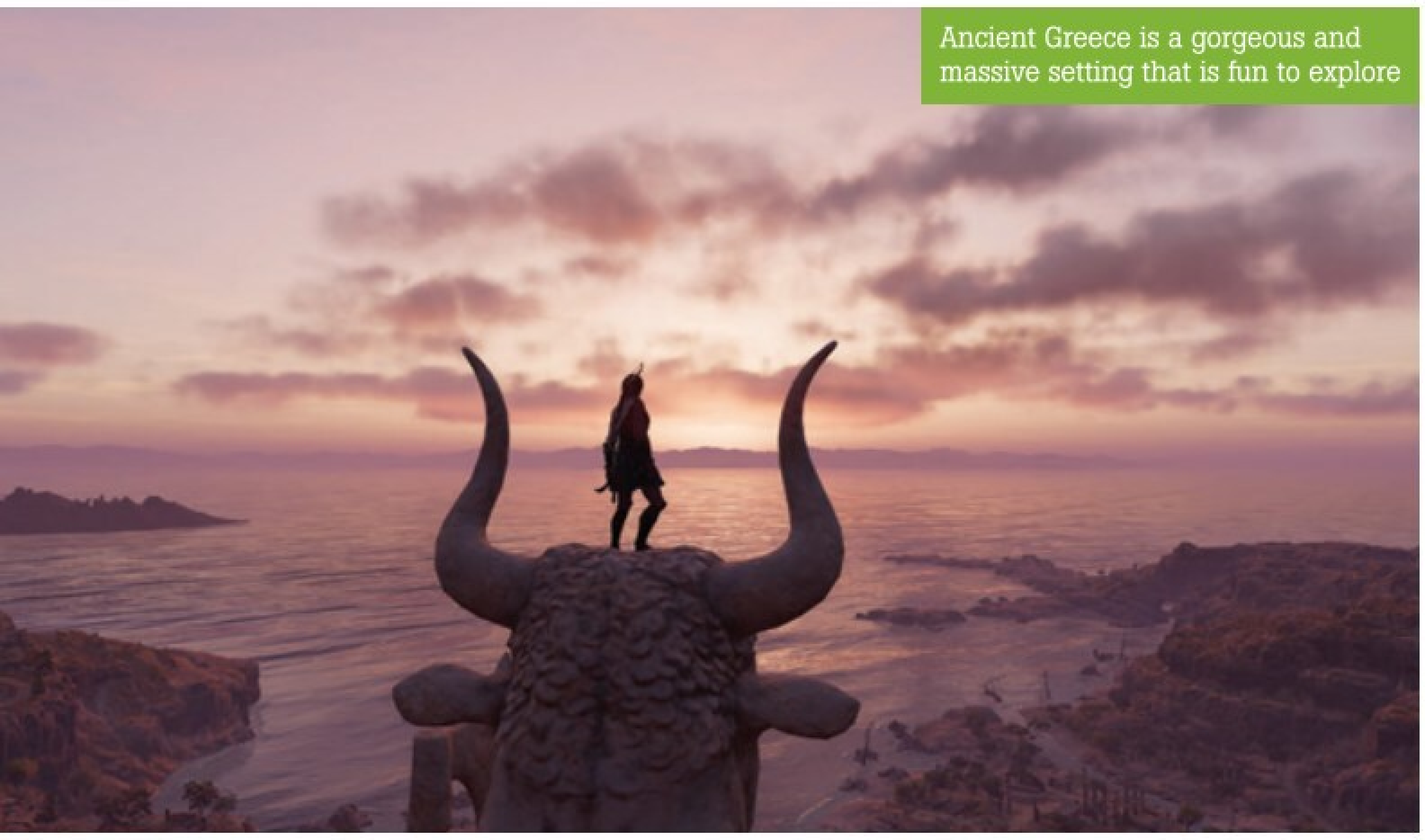
» Graphics
Beautiful vistas, grand architecture, and slick animations bring the world and characters to life

» Sound
An excellent musical score accompanies your adventures, and the voice work is good

» Playability
With so many systems and contextual differences, getting comfortable with the controls takes time, but it all clicks together eventually. Long loading times and sluggish menu navigation are irritating, but not egregious

» Entertainment
Infiltration, combat, and exploration are all fun in the moment. However, the repetitive objectives and lack of crafted moments make the gameplay blur together as the hours pass

» Replay Value
High


Ancient Greece is a gorgeous and massive setting that is fun to explore

Forza Horizon 4

Pure racing bliss

9.25

Xbox One • PC

» Concept
Set in Britain, players are quickly inundated with awesome racing challenges, vehicles to collect, and multiplayer events

» Graphics
All four seasons bring stunning details to a world holding historic and natural beauty that the player can barrel through. Brick walls, trees, and forests are obliterated as races commence. The level of destruction is impressive

» Sound
Some of the announcers grate on the nerves with bad jokes and fake enthusiasm, but the soundtrack offers a nice selection of radio stations, including one dedicated to classical music

» Playability
Forza Horizon 4 consists of a wide variety of tracks that fall into the simulation and arcade racing genres. The driving mechanics perform admirably on both and feature deep customization options for gearheads

» Entertainment
Delivers a wealth of exciting content for both single-player and multiplayer avenues of play, and once again dazzles with its outstanding track designs

» Replay Value
High

gameinformer GOLD

Style 1-Player Racing (12-Player Online) **Publisher** Microsoft Game Studios **Developer** Playground Games, Turn 10 Studios **Release** October 2 **Rating** E

Forza Horizon 4 almost overwhelms with the amount of great content it offers. Complete a race, and another three appear. Travel down a road, and you're alerted that you still have 500 more to discover. Hop behind the wheel of a new car, and the game dangles another dozen in front of you. As you pick away at each of the game's 26 distinct campaign threads (yes, you read that correctly), you may find yourself distracted by hidden billboards, landmarks, seek-and-find missions, and instanced events that pop up at the top of every hour. Forza Horizon 4 offers an absurd amount of things to do, most of which are fantastic, and all of it is backed up by exceptional driving mechanics. This is one of those experiences that you just can't help but lose yourself in, and Playground Games rewards you well for almost every second you spend behind the wheel.

After tearing up the Australian outback, the Horizon Festival moves to Great Britain in this installment. From the sprawling farmlands and quaint villages along dirt roads, this area of the world may seem too peaceful for racing, but Playground quickly reveals that you won't just be looking at these sights from afar; you'll be racing directly through them by any means necessarily. Ripping through wheat fields, smashing through fences, and launching high into the air to land on the rooftop of a century-old church are just some of the chaotic things you'll be pushed to do. Forza Horizon 4 turns Britain's beauty and history into the ultimate playground for cars, complete with some of the biggest jumps you'll see in a racing game.

Britain doesn't just bring a different cosmetic charm to the Horizon Festival. Players also experience all four seasons that affect this region. Rather than just having certain sections of the open world be set in summer or winter, the entire play space transforms when a season rolls in. This means the open world features four distinct variations, each with varying driving conditions. During summer, a track may offer breakneck speeds on dry pavement, whereas the winter variation requires careful drifting across thick snow and treacherous ice. The weather greatly impacts the way you race, and sometimes forces you to retreat to your garage to bring out rides that are more suitable for the conditions. All four versions of the world are beautifully realized and add even more excitement to the already great racing mix.

Subtle story elements come into play in several of the racing types. One turns you into a stunt driver recording scenes for a movie. Another story is structured as a top 10 list for the greatest racing games of all time, where the player experiences races that simulate classic titles like Out Run, Smuggler's Run, Project Gotham, and more. As great as these additions are to the Horizon experience, some of the progress fields focus on customization and push players to spend significant amounts of time tuning cars, creating blueprints, taking photos, and even using Microsoft's streaming service Mixer. If you are a completionist, having to invest time into every aspect of the game is can be annoying.

Forza Horizon 4 also excels at multiplayer, allowing players to experience most of the game in cooperative or competitive ways. This means you can cruise around the open world together (and with up to 71 other players) to make progress in your own campaigns. You can also join up on the same team for racing, although it is more challenging, as it disables the rewind functionality. The hourly Forzathon events bring everyone together on the map for short but enjoyable challenges where every racer contributes points to reach a specific total for speed, jumping, and drifting. All of the multiplayer options (included a game of tag with zombies as a theme) are good fun and reasons to veer off the single-player trail.

Given just how much content is in Forza Horizon 4, a good portion of it is blocked off until specific progress is made. If you're hoping to play the game with friends, some frustration comes from this gating, as you must reach the second year of the competition to be able to take part in specific things like Team Adventures. Given how much fun this racer is, this isn't a punishment, but it is strange that some aspects are blocked off from the outset of play with co-op being such a big hook.

Once Forza Horizon 4 opens up and the map is cluttered with points of interest, you really can't ask for much more from a racer. It hits all of the right notes in terms of racing, exploration, rewards, and customization. Forza Horizon has long been my favorite racing series, and this installment shows that there's plenty of gas left in the tank.

» Andrew Reiner

Soulcalibur VI

Burning brighter than ever

gameinformer SILVER

Style 1 or 2-Player Fighting (2-Player Online) **Publisher** Bandai Namco
Developer Project Soul **Release** October 19 **Rating** T

On its surface, Soulcalibur VI is a reboot for the weapon-focused fighting series. It eschews the slew of new characters in Soulcalibur V for a retelling of the events of the original Soulcalibur, and brings back most of the series' iconic characters in classic attire. Within that nostalgic pitch, however, is a combat system that deftly builds on its predecessors, with several smart improvements that give players more ways to dig into a fighter that's equal parts intricate and flashy.

Fighting is still rooted in simple 3D movements and vertical, horizontal, and kick attacks, which all feel intuitive. Although combos are more prominent than they have been in the past, most are simple; you benefit more from learning a wide array of attack strings to trick your opponent than optimizing how much damage you get when any of them land, which leads to diverse fights based on a great mix of reaction and memorization.

That said, a number of smart refinements make Soulcalibur VI's combat more nuanced than ever. I was worried the new Reversal Edge attack would dumb down combat, but it actually adds an interesting new layer. Executing the move, which locks both players into a rock-paper-scissors showdown if landed, has some strategy behind it. You can charge it to parry attacks, or land it immediately if you catch someone off-guard.

A combination of new and refined defensive mechanics also make it easier to break out of an opponent's pressure. Guard impacts now deflect any kind of attack and don't use up your soul gauge, but still require clutch timing to pull off. The addition of the Soul Charge also gives you a way out of oppressive situations by knocking your opponent away and powering up your attacks for a short time.

With all these new options and the unique mechanics of individual characters, it helps that the onramp is smoother than ever. Not only does the tutorial get you up to speed on every universal mechanic, but the "combat lessons" tab in the pause menu gives you a brief rundown of each character's gameplan, as well as a few suggestions about which moves to use at different ranges. This gives you a great starting point to work with as you find new options and introduce your own twists on your favorite character.

The single-player options include the standard arcade and training modes, but also two story modes. Libra of Soul is ambitious, but held back by an over-reliance on text and scattered pacing. It's an RPG-lite experience in which you create a character based on another character's fighting style then plot your course through a large map in search of opponents, quests, and weapons as you level up. You also do quite a bit of reading, however, which is frustrating since the narrative isn't exactly compelling. The story takes place throughout the early years of the Soulcalibur series, as your character goes in search of both the Soul Edge and Soulcalibur while fending off mysterious "astral fissures" popping up around the world. Despite a few interesting questlines, most of the tales aren't memorable.

Luckily, fights are frequent and varied enough that I was invested in the mode nonetheless. Matches might make the stage slippery, certain attacks much stronger, or your opponent's attacks poisonous. I liked that I needed to zero in on different aspects of combat, managing my movements carefully or learning what the best approach with a particular attack button is. The A.I. is surprisingly nuanced, too; I remember specific enemies that were overeager about reflecting my attacks or relentlessly tried to push me off the edge.

The other story mode, Soul Chronicle, takes a more traditional approach, consisting of visual-novel-style stills telling the story of individual characters in the early years of Soulcalibur's timeline between fights. These storylines intersect with Libra of Soul and feel more coherent, but it's only mildly interesting in the face of Libra of Soul's grander scope.

The online suite is more standard, with the usual ranked matches, casual lobbies, replays, and leaderboards we've come to expect, though it's a little unfortunate you can't snag replays of highly ranked players. The matches I've played online thus far have been stable and do a decent job of obscuring poor connections, though one and two-bar connections still have hitches and slowdown.

Soulcalibur VI takes the opportunity to re-introduce the series after a hiatus and runs with it, making the series feel fresh while offering a deep fighter with lots for lone players to dig into. The single-player offering suffers from some bloat, but weaves combat into its narrative better than most other fighting games, and the fighting at the center of it all is better than ever. Whether you're a newcomer or a dedicated fan, the latest retelling of the story of souls and swords is a captivating one. » **Suriel Vazquez**

8.75

PS4 • Xbox One • PC

» Concept
Bring the classic weapon-based fighter to modern consoles, refining the combat and single-player offerings along the way

» Graphics
Individual character models look fantastic, and the appeal of creating your own outlandish fighter is still good for a couple of laughs

» Sound
Most of the stage and background tracks are memorable, though a song from The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt ends up being the highlight

» Playability
New defensive options and a decent introduction to the intricate characters makes Soulcalibur's fighting an absolute blast for veterans and newcomers

» Entertainment
The single-player offerings lean a little too heavily on lots of reading between bouts, but the way Libra of Soul implements the actual combat stands out among fighting-game campaigns

» Replay Value
High

Lego DC Super-Villains

It's quite good to be bad

8.5

gameinformer SILVER

Style 1 or 2-Player Action **Publisher** Warner Bros. Interactive **Developer** TT Games **Release** October 16 **Rating** E10+

PS4 • Xbox One
Switch • PC

» Concept
Take your created character through an all-new story in which you pal around with Lex, The Joker, and the rest of the villains

» Graphics
TT Games has outdone itself, with wonderfully detailed worlds, characters, and plenty of Lego-oriented destruction

» Sound
Performances are lively and fun, capturing the kid-friendly villainy that fuels the experience. Bad guys trigger a lot of alarms and noisy alerts, however, so keep your mute button handy

» Playability
TT Games has addressed several long-standing gameplay issues and made character swapping easier than ever

» Entertainment
The zany story, huge roster of great characters, and quality-of-life updates make this one of the best entries in the entire Lego library

» Replay Value
High

Momentum is a powerful force – just ask anyone who's been on the receiving end of one of Superman's flying kicks. On a more grounded level, the impulse to continue with what's worked in the past can make a creative endeavor feel stale, whether we're talking about superhero movies, comic books, or video games. Lego DC Super-Villains isn't reimagining the core of the Lego games, but TT Games has clearly learned from recent missteps. The result is one of the best (and baddest) games that the studio has released.

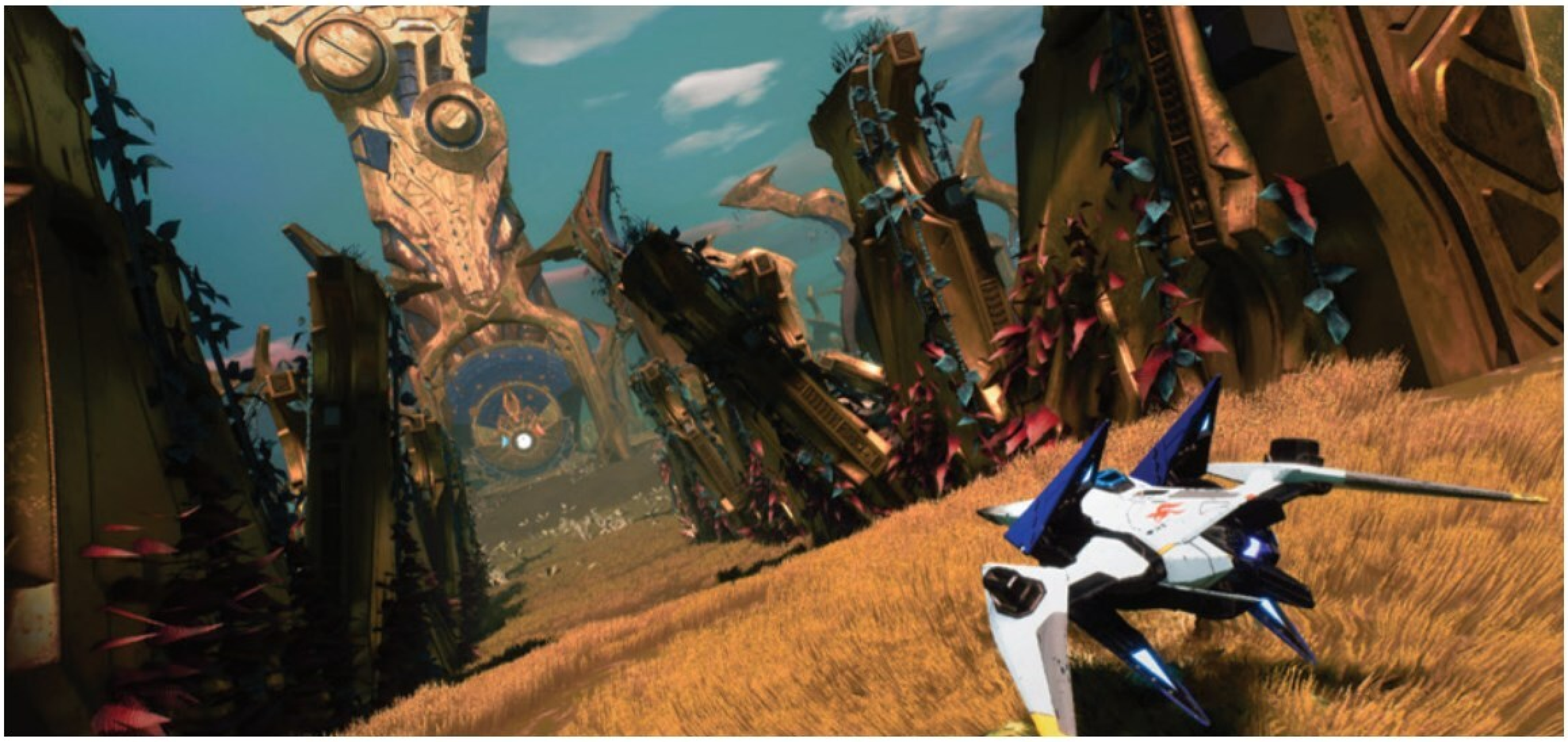
The name should clue you in to its setup; forget about Batman and his super friends, this one's all about the villains. In true Lego fashion, the roster includes big names like Joker and Lex Luthor, and a dizzying array of fun second-tier heels like Mirror Master and Granny Goodness. The original story is a hoot. The Justice League suddenly disappears, replaced with a group of shady individuals from Earth 3 calling themselves the Justice Syndicate. These also-rans seem like close-enough versions of their contemporaries, with Ultraman filling in Superman's boots and Owlman donning Batman's cowl. Ultimately, they're up to no good, which is something that only Earth's villains seem to notice. They can't let these interlopers take advantage of Earth's plunder; that's their job! It's a fun setup for the familiar sight gags, snappy (and well-voiced) dialogue, and humorous tone we all know from TT Games.

You're part of it all, too. In one of the boldest departures from past games, your created character is no longer relegated to free play. Instead, your creation is part of the narrative, right from the start. I enjoyed watching my minifig doppelganger gain new abilities throughout the tale, becoming one of the more powerful faces around (and an excellent utility player that helped minimize the need for swapping characters). I've never gotten into custom characters as much as my kids have, but this time around I was fine-tuning my hero as I unlocked new visual options.

DC Super-Villains backs up its charm with a host of gameplay improvements. First and foremost, it's not prone to crashing or bugging out relentlessly. It also has little quality-of-life improvements sprinkled throughout. In the past, when you encounter a task that your current character can't perform, such as blowing up silver bricks as Harley Quinn, your character will look at the camera and shrug. Ordinarily, you'd then have to manually cycle through the roster to find the correct person for the job. Now, when you swap, it immediately jumps to an appropriate one – a particular time-saver in free-play mode, which offers more than a 100 different characters to pore over. Platforming is more precise than in past games, and level designs don't lean on extended jumping sections as much as they have in the past. That aspect has always been weak, and it's about time that TT Games gave it some attention. Puzzles can still occasionally be a little out there, but loads of built-in hints keep younger players and their impatient parents moving if needed.

When you're done with the story, you explore a huge open world divided into well-known locations like Metropolis, Gotham City, and Smallville. You'll probably spend most of your time exploring those spaces, solving one-off environmental puzzles and helping your fellow villains with silly side missions. You're still a villain at heart, however, which means your actions can draw the attention of law enforcement if you're not careful. It's a low-key riff on Grand Theft Auto's wanted levels, which answers the question: Why doesn't anyone care that I'm breaking everything? Answer: They do, but it doesn't get in the way too much.

I was disappointed with last year's Lego Marvel Super Heroes 2, but Lego DC Super-Villains addresses virtually everything I saw wrong with that release. If you hate Lego games, this isn't going to change your mind. For everyone else, this is a delightful return to form which hopefully serves as a reference for TT Games' future projects.
» Jeff Cork



Starlink: Battle For Atlas

Introduction to space adventure

Style 1 or 2-Player Shooter **Publisher** Ubisoft **Developer** Ubisoft Toronto **Release** October 16 **Rating** E10+

Expectations are best left at the door when entering into Starlink, Ubisoft's late-to-the-party toys-to-life space adventure. Targeted to younger space explorers, it still maintains enough complexity to draw in experienced players. And while physical toys are a big selling point, the whole thing is playable without them (see sidebar). Capitalizing on the joy of discovery and experimentation, Starlink may be simple, but it's a lot of fun. It's also a natural fit for its Switch platform-exclusive co-stars, the Star Fox team, and there's no reason the entire thing can't be played through with Fox McCloud in the cockpit.

As a squad of space explorers drawn to a distant solar system, you unravel the mystery of an alien teammate's origin and get entangled in a war against a conquering legion of baddies. You pilot powerful ships across seven planets and the outer space region that seamlessly connects them; the game world feels large and filled with curated content. Your ship is equally at home in asteroid-strewn dogfights, or skimming along planetary surfaces. Destroy enemy fighters and mechs, build alliances with the locals, research animal species, and uncover lost relics left behind by an ancient civilization, all from behind the stick of your versatile vehicle.

Starlink's narrative and gameplay tropes rarely surprise, but the narrative flow maintains momentum in the lead-up to the explosive conclusion. Progression is satisfying thanks to a procedural system of planetary control; I enjoyed slowly bending each planet to my alliance by completing missions, bringing down enemy towers, and finally assaulting dreadnoughts. Only in the later hours do some of these tasks become rote.

The big selling point is the moddable ships, pilots, and weapons, which represent an impressive array of customization. Hitting upon a cool damage combo and decimating the enemy is a blast, like transforming a bloom of void energy into a fire vortex by infusing it with a flamethrower. Pilots receive a cluster of power-ups and special abilities, earned by using different ships and weapons, but pilot switch-outs are unfortunately discouraged; the more you vary your squad, the more grinding is required to keep them all up to snuff. Your best bet is to choose a pilot you like early on, and stick with them as you scale the power ladder. That balance issue really slowed things down for me in the middle hours.

While the cartoony graphics aren't going to blow your mind, the colorful art and weapon effects sell the alien nature of the landscapes, and I love zipping up through the atmosphere and into space in mere moments to keep the action moving. Planetary battles are exciting but elementary, characterized by lots of circle strafing and witless enemies that go down with ease if you equip the right weapons. Space combat fares slightly better, as the addition of three dimensions of movement introduces some challenge, and I wish it was a bigger focus of the missions.

These battles to control the Atlas system are at their best on the Switch; I've rarely encountered such a well-integrated console exclusive as the Star Fox content. Fox and his team are looped into many mission dialogues and cinematics, and their goofy anthropomorphic animal schtick feels perfectly at home here. Switch owners can also play a whole additional suite of missions about chasing down nemesis Wolf, and it all makes you wonder how this didn't end up as an actual Star Fox game.

Accounting for its likely use by families, Starlink includes a solid couch co-op option, letting two players confront the adventure in split-screen. I like that you can trigger each other's weapon combos, and coordinate on big capital ship assaults, but it can get a bit frustrating that the game won't let you get far from your partner before teleporting you back into proximity.

I eventually abandoned the physical toys for the convenience of quick onscreen tweaks, and the road to victory had some bumps and dips with balance issues and some repetitive mission structures. Nonetheless, I found a lot to like in Starlink's uncomplicated and wholesome sci-fi campaign. And I have no doubt that the 11-year-old version of me would be at least twice as thrilled. » **Matt Miller**

This review pertains to the Switch version of Starlink: Battle For Atlas. The game is also available on PS4 and Xbox One, but does not include any Star Fox content

8

PS4 • Xbox One
Switch

» **Concept**
Battle in space and across the planets of an alien solar system in this family-friendly adventure of ship combat

» **Graphics**
Colorful and exotic environments fire up the imagination, even if the detail and textures are nothing to write home about

» **Sound**
Playful voicework recalls rollicking Saturday morning cartoons of the '80s

» **Playability**
Core combat is straightforward and often simple. Navigation and movement feel accessible and streamlined, but depth is available through the ship mods and progression loop

» **Entertainment**
An engaging entry point into space combat and exploration, with just enough sophistication to be attractive to some veteran pilots

» **Replay Value**
Moderate

To Toy Or Not To Toy

Starlink can be purchased and played as a toys-to-life experience, or digitally without toys, all at a variety of price points. Buyer beware; whether physical or digital, the game gives you more lives (ships) and flexibility in combat the more you've purchased.

The toy ships are solid and attractively sculpted, and the pilot minis are detailed. Everything can be slotted on a controller mount that comes with the game, and the system works without a hitch. Switching out components and seeing those changes reflected in-game can be a ton of fun, but it's an expensive proposition. In a nice twist, physical toys used with a copy of the game remain unlocked on that copy for a week.

Life Is Strange 2: Episode 1 – Roads

A bold new beginning

8.25

PS4 • Xbox One • PC

» Concept
Return to the Life is Strange universe with new characters and a new setting, while making difficult decisions as you and your brother run from the police

» Graphics
This journey through the countryside is beautiful with its hand-painted textures and vivid colors

» Sound
The acoustic, folksy guitar soundtrack supports emotional scenes and wonderfully reflects the protagonist's own music tastes

» Playability
Navigating through environments is easy to grasp, and the dialogue interface works well

» Entertainment
The relationship between the two brothers feels genuine and meaningful, and their uncertain circumstances make for a gripping story

» Replay Value
Moderate

Style 1-Player Adventure **Publisher** Square Enix **Developer** Dontnod Entertainment **Release** September 27 **Rating** M

Starting over can be difficult, but sometimes it's for the better. By leaving behind the picturesque Arcadia Bay and the beloved cast of the original Life is Strange, developer Dontnod tells a bold and engaging story. Life is Strange's familiar focus on relationships works well, and small tweaks to the dialogue system bring some welcome nuance. The sense of renewal also extends to the narrative; new protagonists Sean and Daniel are also starting fresh as they leave behind their home in a tale about grief, coming of age, and identity.

Though much has changed, the factors that made the first Life is Strange memorable are still alive and well, like balancing grounded storytelling with fantastical elements. The lives of Sean and his younger brother Daniel are turned upside-down when tragedy strikes. The police are on their trail, and Daniel struggles with a newfound and confusing telekinesis power that can have devastating effects on those around him.

Your time is spent interacting with characters, making choices that could have far-reaching consequences, and exploring environments to learn more about those around you. I enjoyed roaming through Sean's home in the early moments and learning about the family's ups and downs. Sean's voice strains when he observes a woman's bicycle in his basement and boxes labeled "Karen." Judging from his tone, these could be his mother's things, but she is no longer in the picture. Though the format of dialogue and exploration is familiar, it still works. Small changes make talking to other characters more of an immersive experience. For example, you can multitask with things around your desk, like drawing on a post-it note, as you Skype with a friend.

Life is Strange 2 is light on gameplay, focusing on character development and narrative (similar to Deck Nine's Life is Strange: Before the Storm). With little puzzle-solving outside of fetching specific items and escaping a room, this first episode's priority is weaving a story without giving players distracting mechanics. For such a narrative-centric series, I prefer this approach.

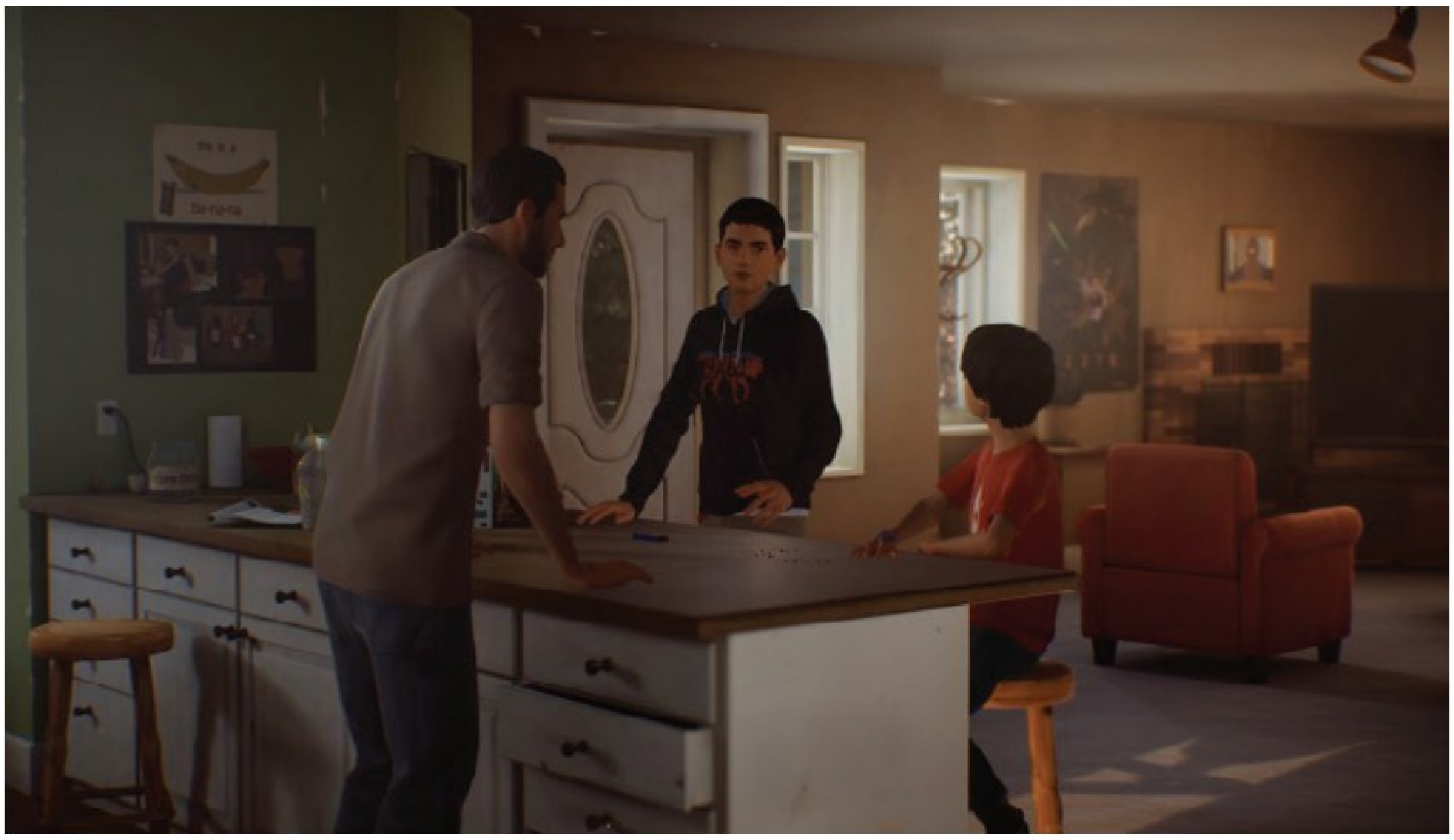
The two protagonists are on the run from the police, but this doesn't translate to nonstop action. Life is Strange 2 revels in its quieter scenes, and it has plenty. You bond with Daniel by teaching him to skip rocks, or sketch specific locations (which is a neat way to see the world through Sean's eyes). You also make decisions that are less crucial but sill interesting. The strength of your bond with Daniel depends on how much he trusts you, and scaring him or feeding him potentially harmful forest berries can be detrimental to your relationship. Because these small actions have an effect, such as giving Daniel nightmares, I was careful with how I approached these situations.

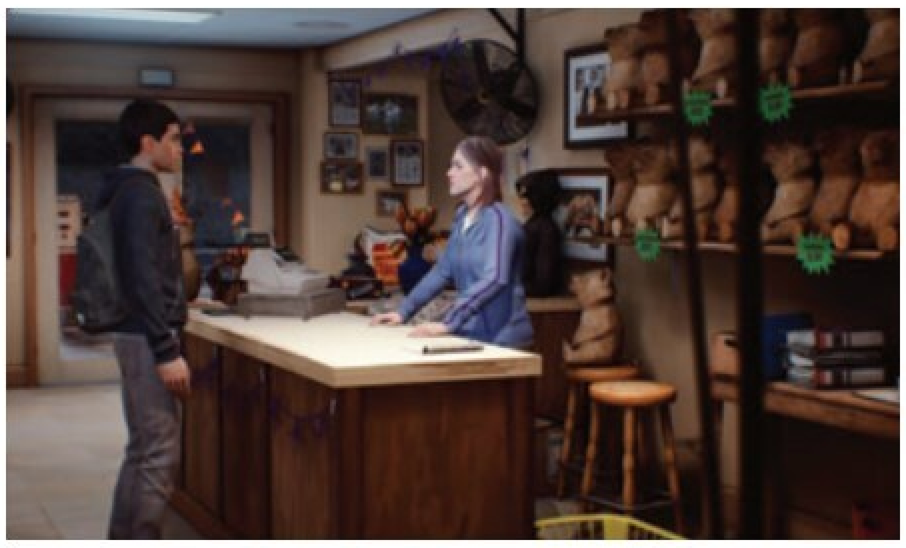
The core of Life is Strange 2 revolves around the brothers' relationship. I sympathized with Sean as he struggled to know how much he should tell his kid brother about what transpired back home, and how best to guide him through treacherous circumstances. Daniel's telekinesis power could shake up the relationship or bring them closer, especially as the two better understand what happened to them.

Major choices in this episode don't feel "wrong" or "right," which serves the story well. Stealing from a shopkeeper could mean food or shelter for the night, and calling your best friend Lyla might put her mind at ease, but it could also put her in danger. Just how far-reaching the consequences are remains to be seen. They may just color your experience along the way rather than make dramatic alterations to the story, which I still find compelling.

Some of these choices have added weight when you must also determine how others may treat you by the color of your skin. Playing as a Latino teenager in October 2016, the political climate seeps heavily into the story. Characters in rural areas may scrutinize whether or not you're truly an American citizen or show distrust toward you. This vulnerability brings dimension to the characters and connected me to their plight, without it feeling shoehorned in. Attempting a political storyline isn't always praise-worthy on its own, but it is dealt with care and detail here that feels genuine enough to work.

I'm curious to see how the story builds upon these themes, as well as what challenges the brothers face next. Dontnod does a great job at introducing these new characters and fleshing them out, and it will be interesting to see how Daniel comes to terms with his life-changing powers. » **Elise Favis**





The Missing: J.J. Macfield And The Island Of Memories

More hit than miss

Style 1-Player Platforming **Publisher** Arc System Works **Developer** White Owls **Release** October 11 **Rating** M

8

PS4 • Xbox One
Switch • PC

» Concept
A haunting side-scrolling adventure through a dreamlike world filled with puzzles that force you to hurt the main character

» Graphics
These simple environments lack fine details, but the art design is incredible, offering stunning vistas and a brilliant blend of colors

» Sound
The voice acting is awkward at times and the soundtrack is forgettable, but these elements don't detract too much from the overall experience

» Playability
Several puzzles are clever and highly rewarding. Sadly, White Owls does a poor job explaining a few important mechanics, which can cause headaches

» Entertainment
This heartfelt and poignant adventure offers thrilling moments centered on a strong core idea

» Replay Value
Moderate

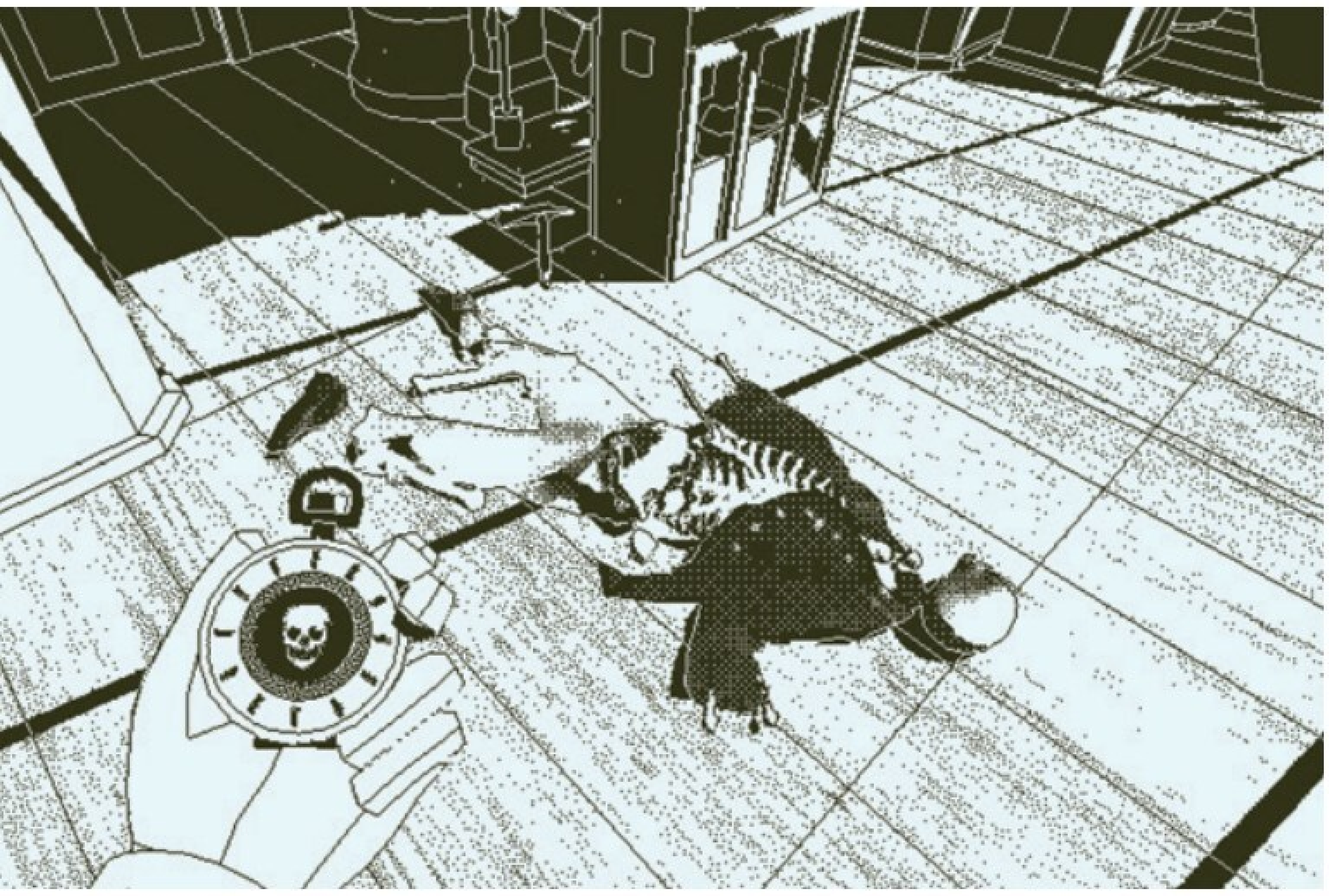
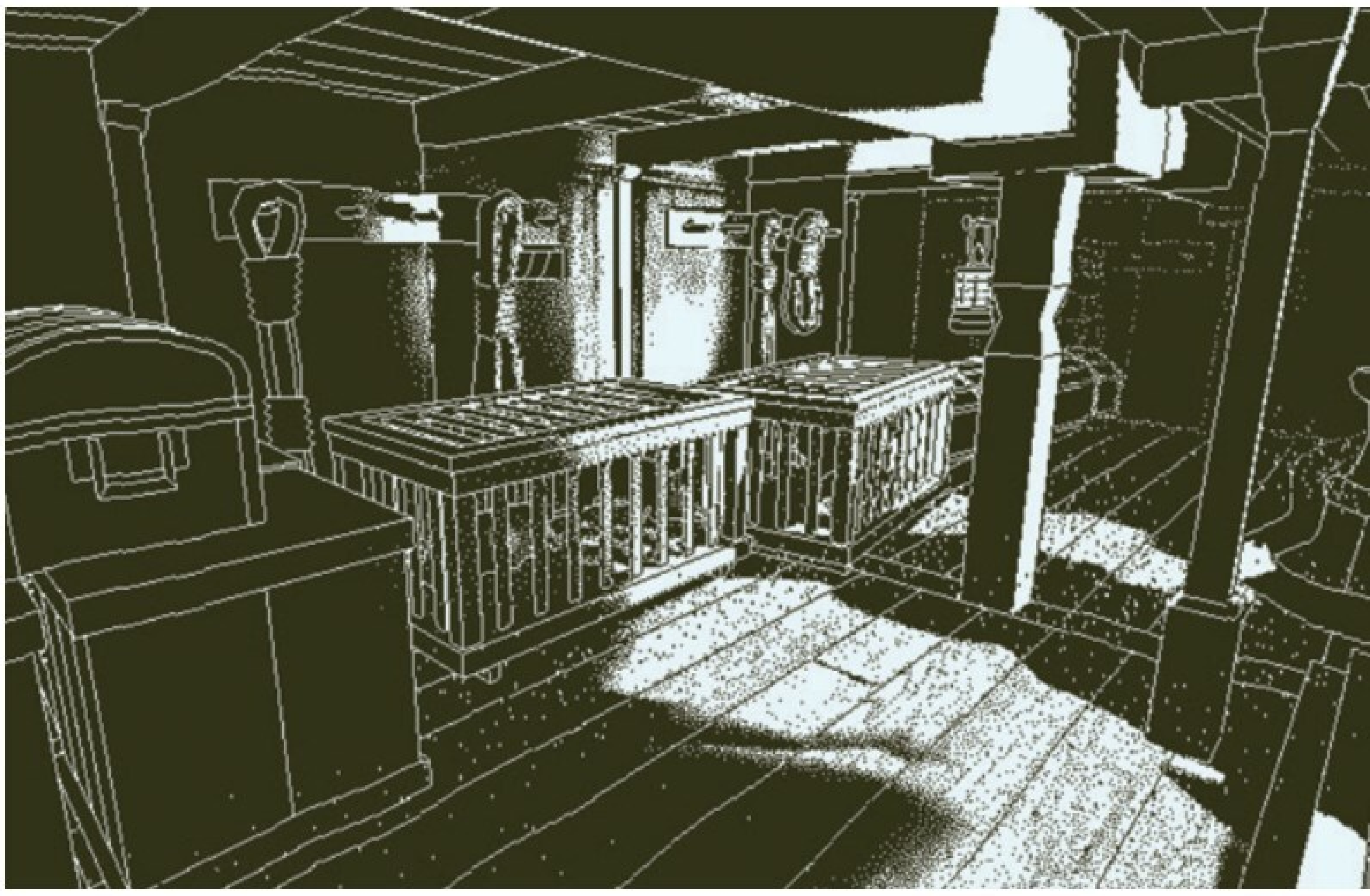
Memoria is a remote island off the coast of Maine rumored to awaken the memories of everyone who sets foot on its deserted shores. When two young adults named J.J. and Emily set foot on the island for an intimate camping weekend, they inadvertently dredge up repressed emotions that send them into a destructive spiral. The Missing is the latest game from Deadly Premonition director Hidetaka "Swery" Suehiro. As Swery fans have come to expect, The Missing features its fair share of bizarre and awkward moments, but it ultimately tells a poignant story using a mechanic that asks players to continually dismember their character.

As J.J. travels across Memoria Island looking for her missing friend, she encounters a series of deadly environmental hazards like electrified pools of water, razor-sharp buzzsaws, and fiery deathtraps. While most would meet a grizzly end in this harsh world, J.J. has the remarkable ability to regenerate her body and recover from any injury. Growing back lost limbs at the push of a button is a lot of fun, but how The Missing incorporates these body horrors into its puzzle is often brilliant. For example, at several points, I had to set J.J.'s body on fire to light up darkened corridors or use her charred flesh to set overgrown brambles ablaze.

One of my favorite ways to injure J.J. was to break her neck, which causes the entire world to flip upside-down. This leads to a series of clever environmental mazes that ask you to continually flip between these two perspectives. Fortunately, The Missing doesn't belabor its gimmicks. As soon as I got the handle on one puzzle type, White Owls introduced a new element or put a new spin on an old mechanic in a fun way.

The Missing doesn't hold your broken hands when you get stuck; it encourages trial and error. Fortunately, most of The Missing's environmental puzzles are easily solved through logical deduction and exploration. On the other hand, The Missing fails to properly explain a few basic mechanics. I got stuck for far too long during one early puzzle because I didn't realize I could throw objects, since you have to hold down a button to do so. Fortunately, there were only a handful of moments where I could have used a tooltip, and The Missing's environmental challenges are rewarding enough that I found it easy to quickly move on to the next thing.

A sense of dread and sorrow underlies J.J.'s entire adventure, but the themes of destruction and regeneration tie into the narrative in a clever way. The Missing's story features its fair share of weirdness, such as a doctor with a moose head or a talking stuffed animal, but, in the end, The Missing tells a moving story about J.J.'s personal struggles that caught me off guard more than once. Like its surprisingly heartfelt narrative, this quirky indie side-scroller came out of nowhere, but I'm glad I didn't miss out on The Missing.
» **Ben Reeves**

Return Of The Obra Dinn

Hauntingly good

8.75

gameinformer SILVER

Style 1-Player Puzzle **Publisher** 3909 LLC **Developer** Lucas Pope **Release** October 18 **Rating** NA

PC

» Concept
Using a magical time-travel device and a notepad, figure out what happened to the vanished crew of a merchant ship

» Graphics
The combination of monochromatic tone and line art is visually arresting, especially when the game is in motion

» Sound
A fantastic orchestral soundtrack lends weight to both somber and exhilarating moments

» Playability
The time travel and investigation mechanics are easy to learn and understand, but to master them you'll need to spend a fair amount of time with each

» Entertainment
Return of the Obra Dinn marries challenging investigation puzzles to a striking visual presentation to create an adventure worth taking

» Replay Value
Low

In Return of the Obra Dinn, you play an insurance inspector investigating an abandoned merchant ship to determine what happened to the crew. Armed with only a notebook and a handy device called a Memento Mori (which is capable of turning back time to the moment of someone's death), your job is to run through the fates of the 60 people who once called the ship home. While this premise seems ripe for spooky thrills, Obra Dinn leans away from horror. Instead, it presents a quality puzzler that plays like an ambitious, surrealistic version of Clue.

Nothing is what it seems in Return of the Obra Dinn. Your two ways of interacting with the world are your Memento Mori and the journal, but both are surprisingly complex. Using the Memento Mori recreates the moment of a victim's death as a freeze frame, including the surroundings. You can walk around, see the murderer, the people who were around at the time of the killing, and hear voice snippets to explain the context of the deaths. One early scenario I discovered on the top deck of the ship had one man refusing to let a cargo worker onto a life boat in the middle of the storm before brutally bludgeoning the cargo worker to death to avenge the killing of his brother. I learned more about the brother's death when I reached the cargo deck, which allowed me to see the full truth behind the scenario and make some important calls.

Obra Dinn isn't a narrative adventure where you're going to spy a sheet of paper that conveniently gives you the answer to one of your puzzles. You have to examine every scene and come back to them several times with the Memento Mori. While this might sound like tedious backtracking, it's just the opposite. You often uncover new details that are essential in solving puzzles, like seeing new wounds or suspicious details in the margins of a scene.

Your journal holds a crew manifest, one sketch of the entire crew, a map of all the decks, and a glossary. It's also where you input what you think happened to crew members, with every fate serving as a puzzle. You need to answer how the person died (or escaped), who they were killed by, and how. You have to get a trio of crew members' fates correct before the journal validates them, curbing your ability to brute force your way through puzzles.

The goal seems straightforward, but Obra Dinn is hard. For those who remain undaunted by steep challenges, the interlocking puzzles are fantastic, especially as you come to understand the tools at your disposal. Early on, I rarely used the sketch in the journal because I was so focused on investigating the ties between crime scenes. However, the sketch is just as important because it reveals essential details as well, like character relationships and social status.

Whenever you're bogged down in a problem, you always have a way out – but you may have to question your assumptions. The game does a great job encouraging this as you tackle the trickier mysteries, like crewmates who are only in a few memories. You need to rely on abstract thinking and connecting events across scenarios. Determining certain fates require you to focus on what's missing from a victim's death scene rather than the things that are present.

What's most impressive to me is how paradoxically linear and open Obra Dinn is. Most puzzles can be solved in any order, with only the tools you're given and your own detective skills to guide the way to solving each of the 60 fates. I truly felt like I inhabited Obra Dinn's world because of how strongly its detective gameplay gripped me. Even when I was struggling during my 12-hour playthrough to find answers or the next clue, I couldn't walk away from the computer. I had to see this thing through.

My only frustration with the Obra Dinn is the overarching story. The plot is ultimately fine, with more than enough emotional beats coming together for an engaging mystery. However, the ultimate payoff fails to complement the thoughtful gameplay giving players who solve every fate the narrative short shrift. Luckily, the individual stories you learn about the crew during your investigations – their betrayals, ambitions, loves – are enticing enough on their own to make up for the deficit. This mixed quality of storytelling doesn't stop the experience from highlighting its other strengths; Return Of Obra Dinn is a surprisingly hardcore detective title with a surreal bite, and one that shouldn't be missed by anyone who loves a great challenge.

» Javy Gwaltney

The Jackbox Party Pack 5

Four out of five ain't bad

Style 1-Player Party (8-Player Online) **Publisher** Jackbox Games **Developer** Jackbox Games **Release** October 17 **Rating** T

8

PS4 • Xbox One
Switch • PC
iOS • Android

CHAMP
HECTOR
$954,090
WINNER

Jackbox Games may have accidentally created a fall tradition. Around pumpkin-spice season, the minds behind You Don't Know Jack release a new bundle of party games. Most of those individual games are great. A few kind of stink. But one constant remains: If you want to have a great time with friends, firing up one of the Jackbox Party Packs is an easy way to do so. Jackbox Party Pack 5 keeps the fun rolling, with a mix of five eclectic group-oriented games. And only one of them kind of stinks!

The marquee game is You Don't Know Jack: Full Stream, a new installment in that well-known series. It's basically the same trivia contest as before, but with new questions and a fun wrapper that pokes fun of streaming video services. As players answer questions on their handheld devices, phony shows from Binjpipe like "Too Much Dust" and "Oh Samantha" pop up in a list of recommendations. The tone is as snarky as ever, and new ways to sabotage your opponents (by obscuring their text, requiring a password input, and more) keep the gameplay fresh.

My favorite game has to be Mad Verse City, which has you writing battle raps for giant robots. It's a silly conceit, even for a Jackbox game, and I suspect it was largely driven by how fun it can be to hear text to speech saying weird stuff. Whatever its origins, I loved the combination of coming up with a word Mad-Libs style, seeing it fit into a stanza, and then completing the verse. As with most of these games, the content is as filthy as you want it to be. If you're playing with old people or other boring folks, your boasts don't have to be as scatological to be entertaining. When you're among friends, all bets are off – resulting in some of the best tears-down-your-face laughs I've had in a while.

Patently Stupid is unusual, since it includes a performative element. Players generate problems by filling in a blank ("I can't sleep because of ____," for example), and those problems are distributed to the group. From there, each player takes their new problem, comes up with a new product that solves it, and then adds a name and tagline. Afterward, everyone takes turns presenting their product, distributing tokens to the best ones. The presentations add a lot to the experience, and the simple PowerPoint-like slides allow for comedic moments, such as timing exactly when your killer tagline enters the frame.

Split the Room is the most thoughtful game in the pack, even though it's themed with a cartoon cat doing his best Rod Serling impersonation. Here, the goal is to create scenarios that best divide the group. While you can certainly go for cheap laughs, players who devise the trickiest "Would you rather" conundrums are likely to come out on top. Like most of the other games in the pack, this is a great fit for streaming; viewers can enter your room code and participate by voting themselves, making for an even bigger room to split.

I have to give Jackbox credit for trying something new with Zeeple Dome, but its co-op take on an Angry Birds experience is the weak spot in the collection. The pull-back controls work well, but there's nothing particularly engaging about the action. If you're looking for a way to clear the house party but don't want to flick the lights on and off repeatedly, Zeeple Dome will get people yawning and looking for their coats in no time.

Even with that clunker, Jackbox Party Pack 5 is another great bundle. Solo partiers won't find much to do here (playing You Don't Know Jack against A.I. is a heartbreaking thought experiment), but scrounge up a group and you're good to go. » **Jeff Cork**

» **Concept**
Round up a bunch of friends and compete in several weird and hilarious party games

» **Graphics**
The presentation is unique to each game, with crisp and stylish visuals across the board

» **Sound**
Excellent sound effects and music help keep things moving along, and the announcer banter is fun

» **Playability**
Your mobile devices serve double duty as controllers, which are unsurprisingly great for entering text, drawing, and answering multiple-choice questions

» **Entertainment**
Your enjoyment is dependent on the room's creativity, but great prompts and easy-to-learn games help the humor-challenged from ruining everyone else's fun

» **Replay Value**
High

OUR ANSWER
YOUR ANSWER
JACKBOX.TV
ATMH

Split the Room has a fun Twilight Zone theme, which automatically makes it better

Astro Bot Rescue Mission

A new experience in a familiar genre

9

gameinformer GOLD

Style 1-Player Platforming **Publisher** Sony Interactive Entertainment **Developer** SIE Japan Studio **Release** October 2 **Rating** E10+

PSVR

» Concept
Send miniature robots on a virtual-reality platforming adventure across the universe

» Graphics
The characters and environments look great even with the PSVR's muddy visuals. The scale and design of all the bosses is particularly well done

» Sound
Fun sound effects and an excellent funky soundtrack elevate the experience and had me nodding my head and tapping my feet

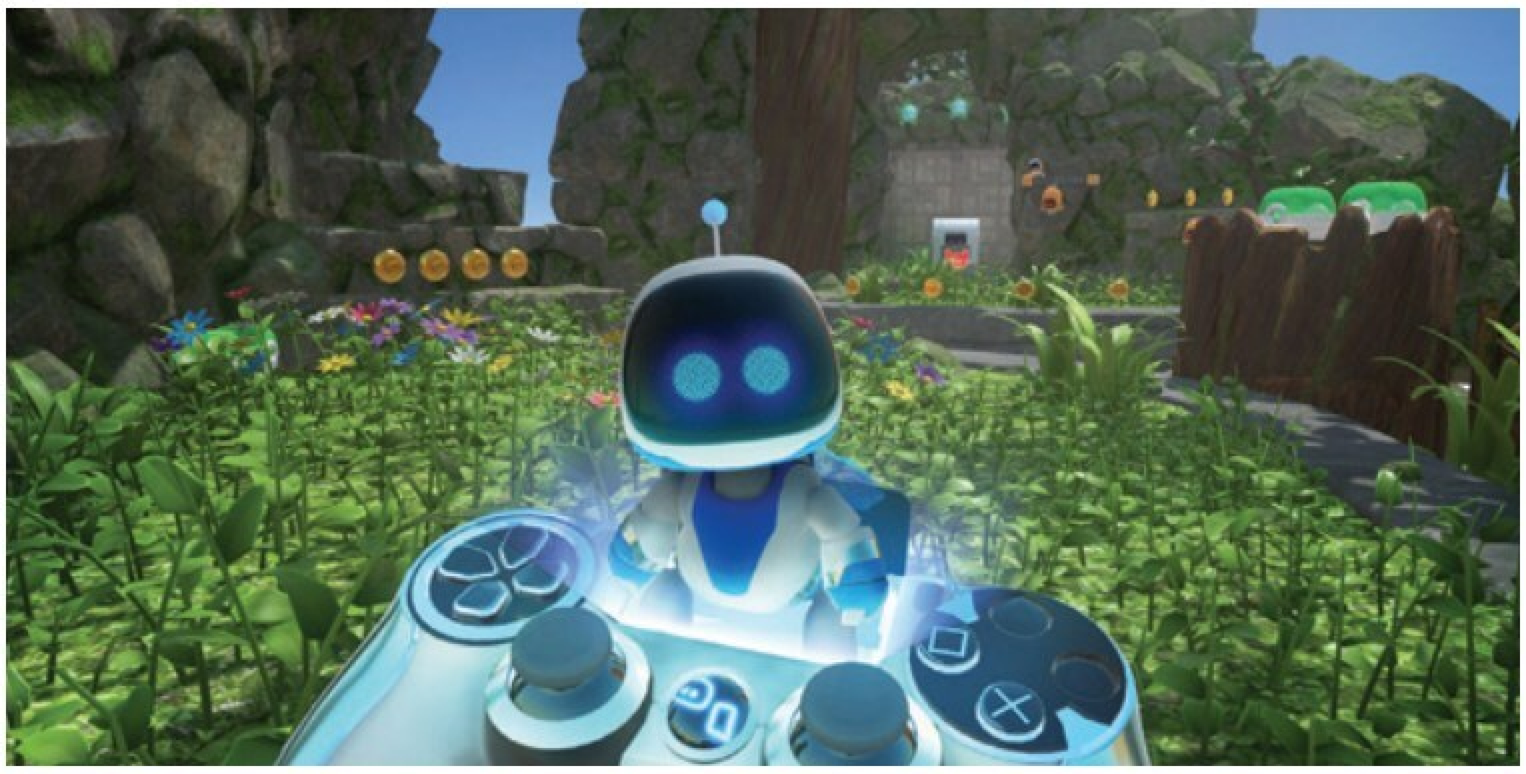
» Playability
Moving the robot and leaping around the environment feels great, and I never fought with the motion controls. Thankfully, the gameplay also makes minimal use of head and body movement

» Entertainment
Astro Bot is an excellent platformer with great motion controls, and its execution in virtual reality creates something fresh in a well-worn genre

» Replay Value
Moderately high

The platformer has been a video game staple for decades, and for good reason. Understanding the genre's mechanics are quick and easy, it affords the opportunity to create fascinating worlds worth exploring, and for some reason it is just super fun to make someone (or something) jump at your command. Astro Bot Rescue Mission takes these old traditions and makes them feel novel and fresh thanks to the way it combines mechanics and how it places the player in its world with the aid of virtual reality. The joyful experience is benefited by the necessity of a headset and is an excellent showcase for how virtual reality can improve and change a familiar experience.

In Rescue Mission, you are one of many Astro Bots, distinguished by a cape, who must rescue their brethren from an alien menace who threw all the other Astro Bots to nearby planets while breaking apart their mothership in the process. To do this, you must visit assorted planets that offer platforming challenges and eventually defeat each planet's boss. You control your caped Astro Bot from the third-person perspective, following them through the stages turning your head or peeking around corners to make sure you're keeping track. You are meant to be a character in the game, and occasionally you must headbutt your way through an obstacle, or dodge a projectile, but the action and challenge is mostly relegated to the Astro Bot you control. You are acting as a spectator to the platforming, and it works exceptionally as a means of placing you in the world to absorb the atmosphere (and fantastic soundtrack) while you play an incredibly polished and charming action game.

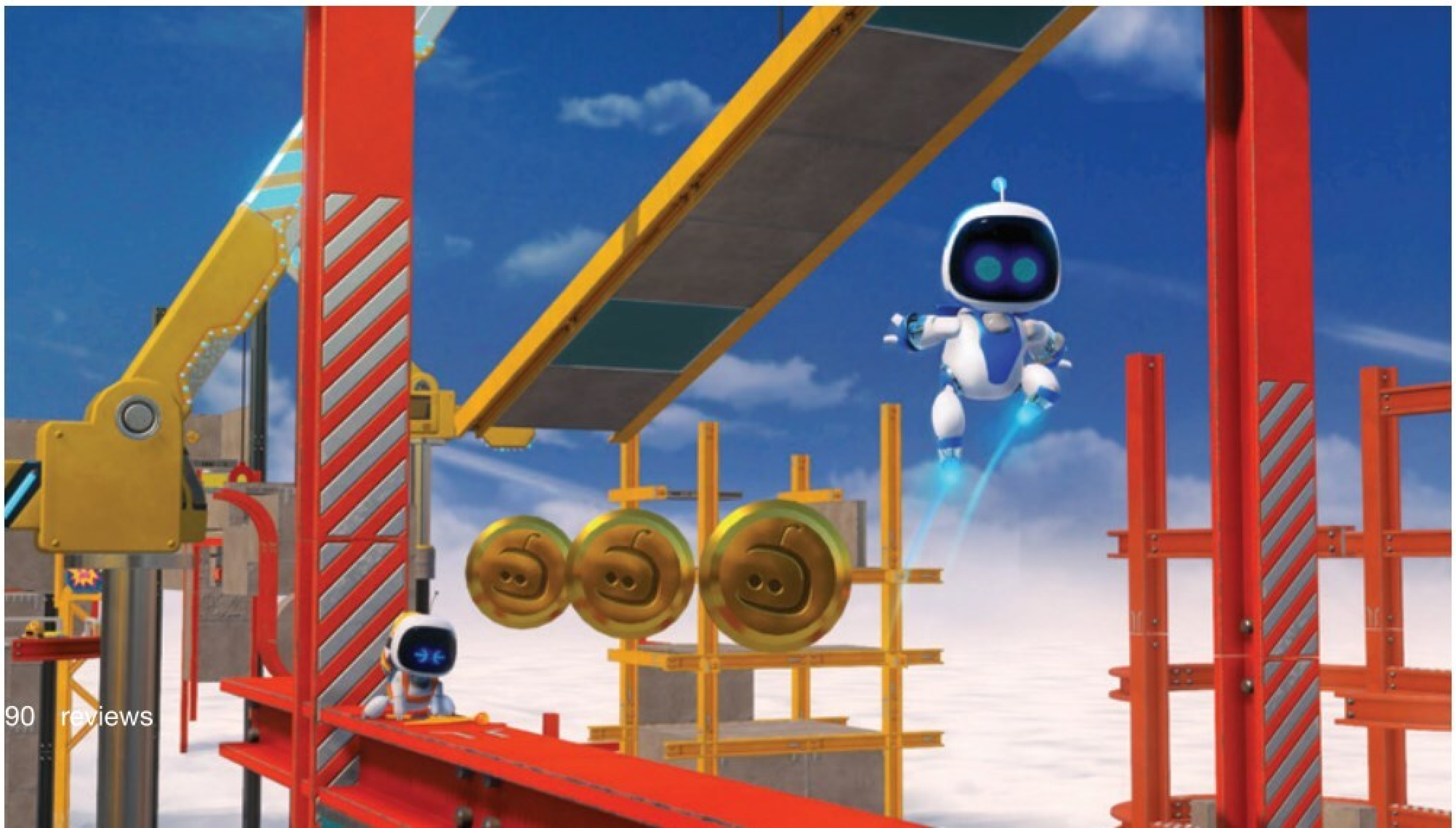


Your interaction in the world is occasionally amplified by giving the controller (which appears in-world as a visible object) assorted powers. You may have to use a hose attachment to put out fires and water plants, or fire off a tethering rope to pull down obstacles and create tightropes for your Astro Bot to cross. These portions are a highlight as you genuinely feel like you are working in tandem with your Astro Bot to overcome challenges by interreacting directly with the world. It creates an enthralling sense of teamwork, even though you are in control of everything.

Along with jumping your way through the worlds, you must also rescue hidden Astro Bots. Finding them is a fun puzzle-solving exercise that also takes advantage of the virtual reality platform. Hearing the bots shout for help prompts you to stop, listen, and physically look around the environment to find them. For the most difficult bots, I would sometimes stand up to get a better view of my surroundings to pin them down. I especially liked the bots that hid themselves at the ends of long hallways perpendicular to the main path. These moments were strangely exhilarating as sending your bot so far away feels surprisingly dangerous. You're a team, you and your caped Astro Bot, and to watch it travel so far away to save a friend made me feel proud. Pride was not something I expected to feel while controlling a cute little robot in a jumping adventure.

You can compare Rescue Mission to Mario titles like 3D World and 3D Land, and the correlation is more than a cursory way to say the three games are all platformers. Nintendo excels at using Mario to create unique experiences in the genre he helped establish, while also highlighting its hardware in interesting ways, and it is always done with an impressive level of polish. Rescue Bots ticks all those boxes, and also nails the difficult to quantify sensation of just being damn fun. Nearly every level introduces new mechanics, or uses the previously established mechanics in surprising ways, and nothing overstays its welcome. The moment you start to tire of something, you are off to an entirely different environment with a whole new set of fun challenges. All of that culminates in a final boss that uses everything you learned up to that point for a thrilling and exciting challenge.

Astro Bot Rescue Mission feels like it came out of nowhere to quietly prove that familiar genres can feel like new experiences with the aid of virtual reality. While the medium is capable of creating entirely new interactive experiences, Rescue Mission serves as a great reminder that the styles of games we already like can be translated to VR, and when it is done as well as it has been here, you get a chance to experience something that feels genuinely new and exciting. » **Kyle Hilliard**



Super Mario Party

Same party, new decorations

Style 1 to 4-Player Party (4-Player Online) **Publisher** Nintendo **Developer** Nintendo **Release** October 5 **Rating** E

The Mario Party franchise has always been about the convergence of board games and minigames with Nintendo characters thrown into the mix. Recent entries deviated from the tried and true formula to unpopular results, but Super Mario Party returns the series to its roots. While the return to the standard board-game format is a welcome adjustment, Super Mario Party supplements the flagship approach with fun peripheral modes to create a mostly enjoyable party game anyone can pick up and play.

The mainstay board-game mode delivers the classic Mario Party experience of four players moving independently through different boards to collect the most stars before you reach the turn limit. While I'm glad this mode has returned, I'm disappointed by the board options. You can only play on four boards, and they all feel small, uninspired, and cramped. Progress through them is mostly linear, with only a few branching paths that eventually converge. While the linearity is alleviated in the free-roam Partner Party mode, the boards are largely forgettable.

One of the more frustrating elements of the Mario Party franchise persists with random dice rolls and arbitrary chance elements still ultimately determining the victor. This remains evident in how you collect stars, which are bought from Toadette if you encounter her on the board. After each star, Toadette relocates randomly across the board, further drilling in the luck element; if you get a star, there's a small chance that Toadette will relocate just a few spaces down, essentially gifting you another star on your next turn.

As with all Mario Party games, the minigames that break up the board-game action are the real centerpieces. Competing in bite-sized competitions to earn coins is often exciting, and the stable of 80 new minigames features more hits than misses. My favorite minigames, like slapping your opponents at the right time for it to be captured on camera, create hilarious situations that stick with me after I turn the game off. Others, like blasting rivals away with high-powered water guns, deliver good action with simple-yet-solid gameplay. The highlights shine bright enough that when the occasional dud pops up, I don't mind.

With such a strong stable of minigames, Super Mario Party also includes ways to enjoy them without moving across a board. River Survival puts all four players in a raft as they paddle down a treacherous river by moving the Joy-Cons like oars. Rowing down the river as one while steering clear of rocks and enemies makes for plenty of amusing moments, and I like how you can aim for balloons along the way to pause the rafting action and play a cooperative minigame to earn extra time to reach the goal. But with only 10 distinct 4-player co-op minigames, you get repeats often. This small catalogue also limits the replay value of the mode, as you can only play them so many times before they become routine for your group.

Sound Stage amps up the motion controls as it sends the characters on stage to compete in rhythm-based games. The presentation of this mode is exciting; the crowd cheers along as you progress through a handful of competitions, and I love how the music accompanying the minigames is tied into one song with a remix of the original Super Mario Bros. Underworld theme serving as a bridge. However, this mode runs into the same problem with variety, with only has 10 rhythm-based games to pull from. Despite this, I love playing through the energetic mode as an intermission between other activities.

Toad's Rec Room is the most unique new mode, giving you the ability to combine two Switch screens to make your own battlefields or add additional puzzles. However, it serves as little more than a diversion. The other modes deliver more substantial experiences centered on the strong library of minigames.

If you want to party by yourself, the new Challenge Road puts you through all 80 minigames organized in a hub world. While some challenges simply have you beating the A.I. rivals, many of them add an extra layer of difficulty, like collecting a certain number of coins or not hitting any obstacles. These extra layers provide additional excitement, though since Challenge Road is single-player only, it's frustrating when you get teamed up with an incompetent A.I. character. Thankfully, those moments are few enough that Challenge Road is a worthwhile solo mode that highlights the best part of Super Mario Party and acts as a solid side to the multiplayer meat of the experience.

Despite lackluster board design and side modes that can become repetitive, Super Mario Party is a fun group game that showcases a diverse collection of minigames. With so many different modes, it's easy for you and your friends to consume the entertaining minigames Super Mario Party delivers.
» Brian Shea

7.25

Switch

» Concept
Bring Mario's friends and enemies together one more time to roll dice, explore a board, and compete in minigames to collect stars

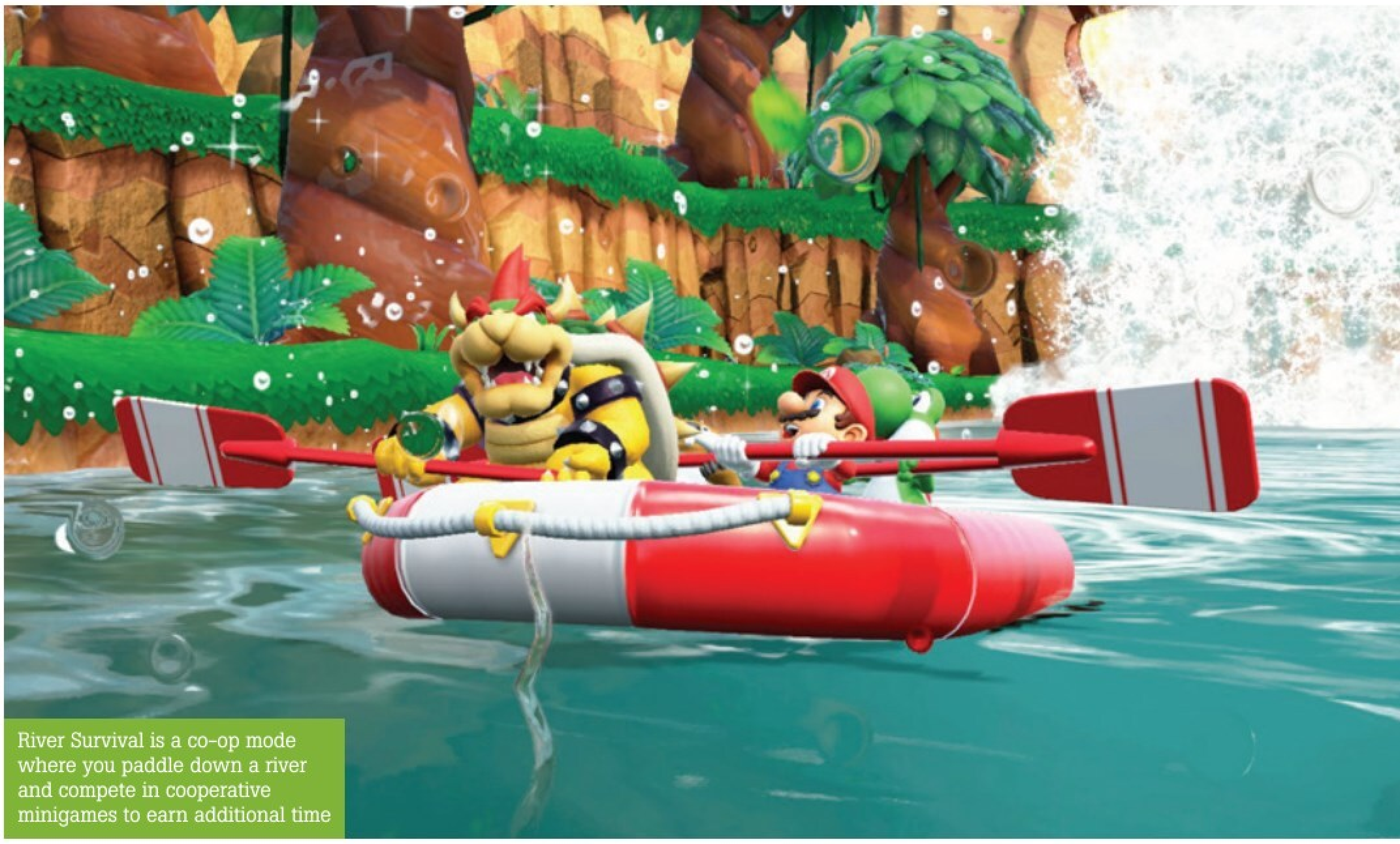
» Graphics
The standard stable of Mario characters all look great, but moments I love most are the goofy sights that come out of the minigames, like Bowser celebrating his perfectly cooked steak in a realistic kitchen

» Sound
A fitting soundtrack complements the action, but the random grunts and limited sayings from the characters are headache-inducing after a while

» Playability
The different modes and minigames are all easy to understand and play, making it simple to jump in with minimal instruction or practice

» Entertainment
The boards are underwhelming and some of the modes suffer from repetition, but the selection of minigames is among the best in the series

» Replay Value
Moderately high



River Survival is a co-op mode where you paddle down a river and compete in cooperative minigames to earn additional time

7.5 The World Ends With You: Final Remix

Platform Switch **Release** October 12 **Rating** T

While the Switch version is still fun, it's far from a great port, and the extra content is pretty disappointing. Then again, if this is your only way to play or revisit a fantastic game, you should definitely take that opportunity. **– *Kimberley Wallace***

7.75 Timespinner

Platform PS4 • PC • Vita **Release** September 25 **Rating** T

As one of many games mimicking the style and structure sanctified by Castlevania: Symphony of the Night, Timespinner has its work cut out for it. It introduces fun twists that distinguish it from the pack, but Timespinner is at its best when it's comfort food, since it nails most of the fundamentals players expect to follow its classic look. **– *Suriel Vazquez***

7 Fist Of The North Star: Lost Paradise

Platform PS4 **Release** October 2 **Rating** M

Lost Paradise tells a new story in the Fist of the North Star mythos but borrows known characters and story elements from the source material and structures the experience to play like the developer's other series, Yakuza. In some ways, this weird amalgamation of franchises works, but it's not without shortcomings. **– *Kyle Hilliard***

7 Wandersong

Platform Switch • PC
Release September 27 **Rating** E

I walked away from my time with Wandersong having enjoyed the story beats and being charmed by both the world and its characters, but I wish I had more fun actually playing it. **– *Javy Gwaltney***

8.5 Labyrinth Of Refrain: Coven Of Dusk

Platform PS4 • Switch • PC **Release** September 18 **Rating** M

Labyrinth of Refrain is an excellent dungeon crawler that brings some cool new features to the table. While the title can be grindy at times and includes some frustrating maps and encounters, the core systems underneath are a joy to tinker with for hours. **– *Daniel Tack***

Visit gameinformer.com/mag for the full reviews

reviews archive

PS4

Adventure Time: Pirates of the Enchiridion	6	Sep-18
Banner Saga 3, The	8	Oct-18
Danger Zone 2	7	Oct-18
Dead Cells	9	Sep-18
Destiny 2: Forsaken	9.25	Nov-18
Dragon Quest XI: Echoes of an Elusive Age	8.25	Oct-18
Earthfall	5	Sep-18
F1 2018	8.75	Oct-18
FIFA 19	8	Nov-18
Fortnite	9.5	Sep-18
Golf Club 2019, The	8	Nov-18
Guacamelee 2	8.75	Oct-18
Jurassic World Evolution	7	Aug-18
Little Dragon's Café	5	Oct-18
Madden NFL 19	8	Oct-18
Mega Man 11	8.75	Nov-18
My Brother Rabbit	7.75	Nov-18
NASCAR Heat 3	7.5	Nov-18
NBA 2K19	9	Nov-18
NBA Live 19	7	Nov-18
NHL 19	8.5	Nov-18
Overcooked 2	8	Oct-18
Phantom Doctrine	8	Oct-18
Prey: Mooncrash	8.5	Sep-18
Pro Evolution Soccer 19	8.5	Nov-18
Shadow of the Tomb Raider	7.5	Nov-18
Spider-Man	9.5	Oct-18
Unravel Two	8	Aug-18
Valkyria Chronicles 4	9	Oct-18
Walking Dead: The Final Season – Episode 1, The	7	Oct-18
We Happy Few	7.75	Oct-18
Yakuza Kiwami 2	9	Oct-18

XBOX ONE

Adventure Time: Pirates of the Enchiridion	6	Sep-18
Banner Saga 3, The	8	Oct-18
Danger Zone 2	7	Oct-18
Dead Cells	9	Sep-18
Destiny 2: Forsaken	9.25	Nov-18
Earthfall	5	Sep-18
F1 2018	8.75	Oct-18
FIFA 19	8	Nov-18
Fortnite	9.5	Sep-18
Golf Club 2019, The	8	Nov-18
Jurassic World Evolution	7	Aug-18
Madden NFL 19	8	Oct-18
Mega Man 11	8.75	Nov-18
My Brother Rabbit	7.75	Nov-18
NASCAR Heat 3	7.5	Nov-18
NBA 2K19	9	Nov-18
NBA Live 19	7	Nov-18
NHL 19	8.5	Nov-18
Overcooked 2	8	Oct-18
Phantom Doctrine	8	Oct-18
Prey: Mooncrash	8.5	Sep-18
Pro Evolution Soccer 19	8.5	Nov-18
Shadow of the Tomb Raider	7.5	Nov-18
Valkyria Chronicles 4	9	Oct-18
Walking Dead: The Final Season – Episode 1, The	7	Oct-18
We Happy Few	7.75	Oct-18

SWITCH

Banner Saga 3, The	8	Oct-18
Captain Toad: Treasure Tracker	8	Sep-18
Dead Cells	9	Sep-18
Fortnite	9.5	Sep-18
Little Dragon's Café	5	Oct-18
Mario + Rabbids: Kingdom Battle – Donkey Kong Adventure	7	Sep-18
Mega Man 11	8.75	Nov-18
Messenger, The	8	Nov-18
Monster Hunter Generations Ultimate	8.5	Nov-18
My Brother Rabbit	7.75	Nov-18
NBA 2K19	9	Nov-18
Overcooked 2	8	Oct-18
Valkyria Chronicles 4	9	Oct-18
Wolfenstein II: The New Colossus	8.5	Sep-18
Xenoblade Chronicles 2: Torna – The Golden Country	7	Nov-18

PC

Banner Saga 3, The	8	Oct-18
Bard's Tale IV: Barrows Deep, The	7.75	Nov-18
Danger Zone 2	7	Oct-18
Dauntless	8	Sep-18
Dead Cells	9	Sep-18
Destiny 2: Forsaken	9.25	Nov-18
Dragon Quest XI: Echoes of an Elusive Age	8.25	Oct-18
Earthfall	5	Sep-18
F1 2018	8.75	Oct-18
FIFA 19	8	Nov-18
Fortnite	9.5	Sep-18
Golf Club 2019, The	8	Nov-18
Guacamelee 2	8.75	Oct-18
Madden NFL 19	8	Oct-18
Mega Man 11	8.75	Nov-18
Messenger, The	8	Nov-18
Monster Hunter World	9.25	Oct-18
My Brother Rabbit	7.75	Nov-18
NASCAR Heat 3	7.5	Nov-18
NBA 2K19	9	Nov-18
Overcooked 2	8	Oct-18
Prey: Mooncrash	8.5	Sep-18
Pro Evolution Soccer 19	8.5	Nov-18
Shadow of the Tomb Raider	7.5	Nov-18
Two Point Hospital	7.5	Nov-18
Valkyria Chronicles 4	9	Oct-18
We Happy Few	7.75	Oct-18
World of Warcraft: Battle for Azeroth	8.75	Oct-18

VITA

Chasm	7.5	Sep-18

3DS

Captain Toad: Treasure Tracker	8	Sep-18
WarioWare Gold	8	Oct-18

iOS

Walking Dead: The Final Season – Episode 1, The	7	Oct-18

gameinformer Volume XXVIII ○ Number 12 ○ Issue 308

STAFF

Publisher
Cathy Preston cathy@gameinformer.com
Editor-in-Chief
Andy McNamara andy@gameinformer.com
Executive Editor
Andrew Reiner reiner@gameinformer.com
Managing Editor
Matt Bertz mattbertz@gameinformer.com
Senior Reviews Editor
Joe Juba joe@gameinformer.com
Senior Previews Editor
Matt Miller miller@gameinformer.com
Features Editor
Kimberley Wallace kim@gameinformer.com
West Coast News Editor
Imran Khan imrankhan@gameinformer.com
PC Editor
Daniel Tack daniel@gameinformer.com
Digital Editor
Brian Shea brianshea@gameinformer.com
Senior Editors
Matthew Kato kato@gameinformer.com
Jeff Cork jeff@gameinformer.com
Ben Reeves ben@gameinformer.com
Senior Associate Editors
Jeff Marchiafava jeffm@gameinformer.com
Kyle Hilliard kyle@gameinformer.com
Associate Editors
Javy Gwaltney javy@gameinformer.com
Elise Favis elisefavis@gameinformer.com
Suriel Vazquez surielvazquez@gameinformer.com

Creative Director
Jeff Akervik jeffakervik@gameinformer.com
Senior Production Director
Curtis Fung curtis@gameinformer.com
Senior Graphic Designer
Laleh Azarshin Tobin laleh@gameinformer.com
Graphic Designers
Samm Langer sammlanger@gameinformer.com
Jen Vinson jenifervinson@gameinformer.com
Web Designers/Programmers
Margaret Andrews margaretandrews@gameinformer.com
Kristin Williams kristinwilliams@gameinformer.com
Video Producer
Ben Hanson hanson@gameinformer.com
Video Editor
Leo Vader leovader@gameinformer.com
Circulation Services
Ted Katzung ted@gameinformer.com
Audience Development Manager
Paul Hedgpeth paul@gameinformer.com

ADVERTISING SALES

Associate Publisher
Rob Borm rob@gameinformer.com
Advertising Sales Director
Damon Watson damon@gameinformer.com
Senior Advertising Sales Associate
Amy Arnold amy@gameinformer.com
Advertising Manager
Janey Stringer janey@gameinformer.com
Marketing Coordinators
Rachel Castle rachel@gameinformer.com
Mark Burger mark@gameinformer.com

CUSTOMER SERVICE

For renewal, address change and Power Up Rewards Pro details:

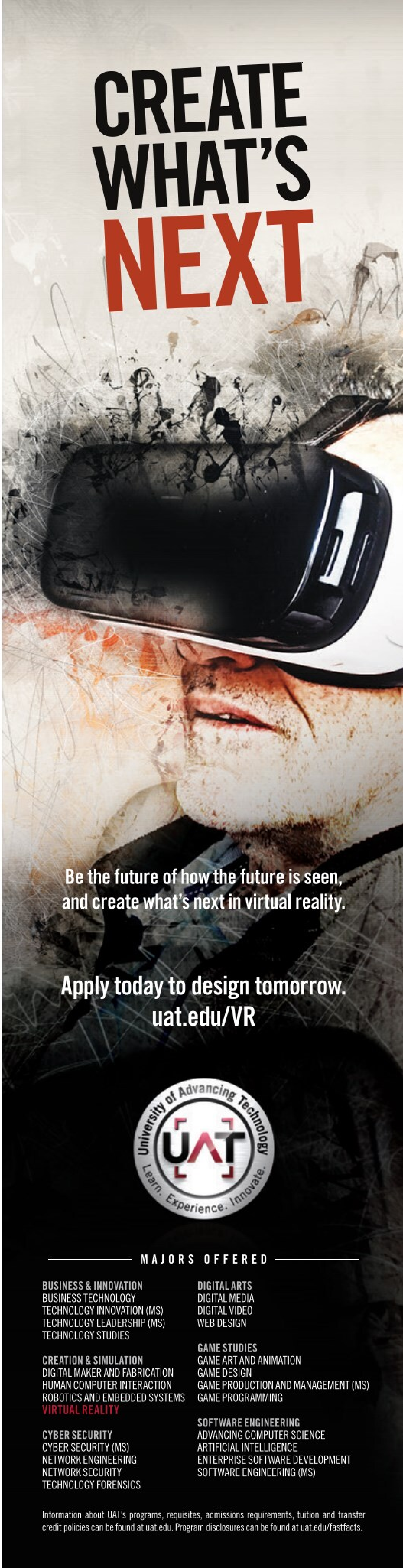
Visit: **www.gameinformer.com**
Email: **customerservice@gameinformer.com**

or send correspondence to:
724 North First St., 3rd Floor
Minneapolis, MN 55401 • Attn: CIS Dept

For subscription inquiry ONLY:
1 (866) 844-GAME (4263)

Manufactured and printed in the United States of America. The Editor welcomes company product information for all video games. Such materials should be addressed to: Editor, Game Informer® Magazine, 724 North First St., 3rd Floor, Minneapolis, MN 55401. Unsolicited manuscripts cannot be returned or acknowledged. Copyright in all screenshots contained within this publication are owned by their respective companies. Products named in these pages are trade names, or trademarks, of their respective companies. All rights reserved; reproduction in whole or in part without permission is prohibited. Game Informer® is a trademark of GameStop. PUBLISHER LIABILITY FOR ERROR The publisher shall not be liable for slight changes or typographical errors that do not lessen the value of an advertisement. The publisher's liability for other errors or omissions in connection with an advertisement is limited to republication of the advertisement in any subsequent issue or the refund of any monies paid for the advertisement. INDEMNIFICATION The advertiser and/or Advertising Agency agrees to defend and indemnify the publisher against any and all liability, loss, or expense arising from claims of libel, unfair competition, unfair trade practices, infringement of trademarks, copyrights, trade names, patents, or proprietary rights or violation of rights of privacy, resulting from the publication of the Advertiser's statement.

Alliance for Audited Media
The New Audit Bureau of Circulations


CREATE WHAT'S NEXT

Be the future of how the future is seen, and create what's next in virtual reality.

Apply today to design tomorrow.
uat.edu/VR

University of Advancing Technology
UAT
Learn. Experience. Innovate.

MAJORS OFFERED

BUSINESS & INNOVATION
BUSINESS TECHNOLOGY
TECHNOLOGY INNOVATION (MS)
TECHNOLOGY LEADERSHIP (MS)
TECHNOLOGY STUDIES

CREATION & SIMULATION
DIGITAL MAKER AND FABRICATION
HUMAN COMPUTER INTERACTION
ROBOTICS AND EMBEDDED SYSTEMS
VIRTUAL REALITY

CYBER SECURITY
CYBER SECURITY (MS)
NETWORK ENGINEERING
NETWORK SECURITY
TECHNOLOGY FORENSICS

DIGITAL ARTS
DIGITAL MEDIA
DIGITAL VIDEO
WEB DESIGN

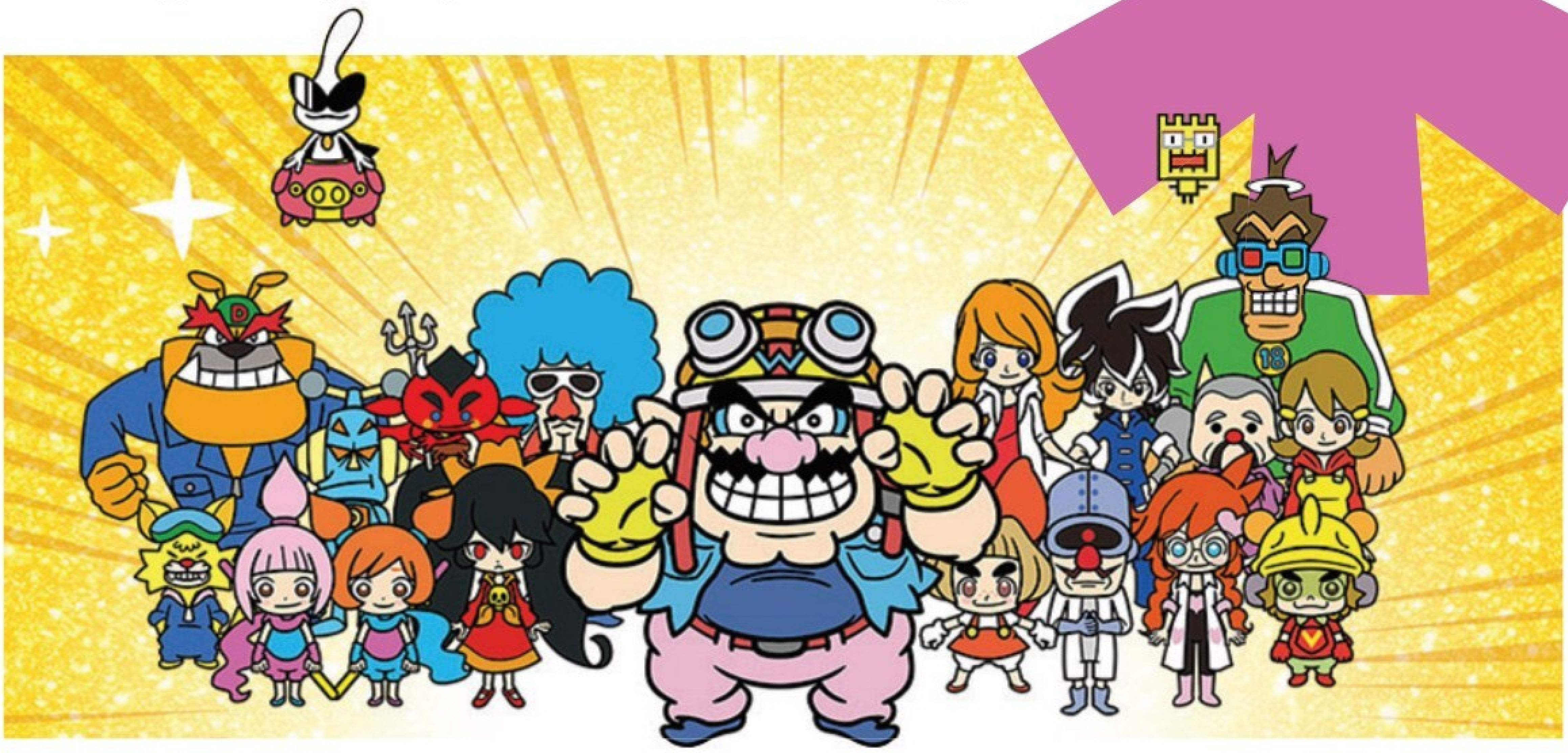
GAME STUDIES
GAME ART AND ANIMATION
GAME DESIGN
GAME PRODUCTION AND MANAGEMENT (MS)
GAME PROGRAMMING

SOFTWARE ENGINEERING
ADVANCING COMPUTER SCIENCE
ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE
ENTERPRISE SOFTWARE DEVELOPMENT
SOFTWARE ENGINEERING (MS)

Information about UAT's programs, requisites, admissions requirements, tuition and transfer credit policies can be found at uat.edu. Program disclosures can be found at uat.edu/fastfacts.

WARIOWARE

Tracking the trajectory of Nintendo's weirdest game



In 2003, the Game Boy Advance received arguably Nintendo's strangest game. The handheld platform had become a haven for Super Nintendo re-releases and Super Nintendo-inspired games, but WarioWare, Inc.: Mega Microgame$! was unlike anything that had come before it.

by Kyle Hilliard

WarioWare introduced the world to the eponymous "microgame" and moved the anti-hero Wario out of Mario's platforming shadow and onto a money-grubbing trajectory he could call his own. The premise was almost as odd as the games found inside of it. Wario needs money, and in order to acquire it, he decides he must release a hit video game. Rather than focus his efforts on one big game, however, he creates more than 200 "micro" or instant action games, each only lasting a few seconds. The player must complete these games in quick succession without failing. The interactive tasks are as diverse as sticking a finger up a nose, capturing fleeing astronauts under a glass, and dodging teeth in a mouth as it closes.

The game was a critical hit, with a Metacritic score of 89, inspiring multiple sequels, spin-offs, and a greatest-hits collection of sorts, WarioWare Gold, which launched earlier this year. To commemorate the series' 15 years, we spoke with Goro Abe, the chief director for WarioWare Gold about the franchise's bizarre legacy and what went into creating Gold.

The concept of the instant-action game first appeared in a Nintendo 64 game that never hit North America. Mario Artist: Polygon Studio launched in 2000 and was creative software for the unsuccessful Nintendo 64DD expansion that let players create and texture 3D models. The package also included a game called Sound Bomber. "There were only eight kinds of microgames in Sound Bomber, but that's where the basic structure of clearing short games in succession along with the background music came together," Abe says.

The first WarioWare took the rules established in Sound Bomber, created additional games, expanded them, and placed them into the WarioWare conceit. The work done in Sound Bomber reverberates to even the most recent release. "The prototype for the Crazy Cars and Wario Whirled microgames in WarioWare Gold appeared in Sound Bomber." Abe says.

One of the reasons WarioWare manages to stay so compelling as it jumps between games is each one is strange in its own unique way. "Our development team makes it very easy for individual team members' personalities to end up in the game," Abe says. "The ideas for new microgames come from the entire staff, for example, and then the people responsible for each microgame come up with ways to add to or remix the new ideas." The playability of each game is as important as its premise and art, a directive that comes from the well-established legacy of its publisher. "We emphasize game balance and accessibility in a very Nintendo-like way, and we're conscious of incorporating the unique humor and flavor of the WarioWare series," Abe says.

WarioWare Touched!

WarioWare Snapped

Along with plenty of original games, the series also relies on Nintendo's history. You might be playing the original Zelda for three seconds or quickly firing the last shot on Mother Brain in Metroid. WarioWare Gold proved particularly challenging to develop in this regard as it referenced more modern games, like Zelda: The Wind Waker and Super Mario Sunshine on 3DS. "Using recent Nintendo games thematically means we have to recreate some advanced 3D graphics. And because microgames can be sped up to four times their original speed, we had to devise them in such a way that there would be no processing slowdown at high speed," Abe says. "In some cases we created assets from scratch, and other times we used data we got from the original games' development teams." After they are created, the microgame is sent to the developers of the original game for one final opportunity to provide feedback.

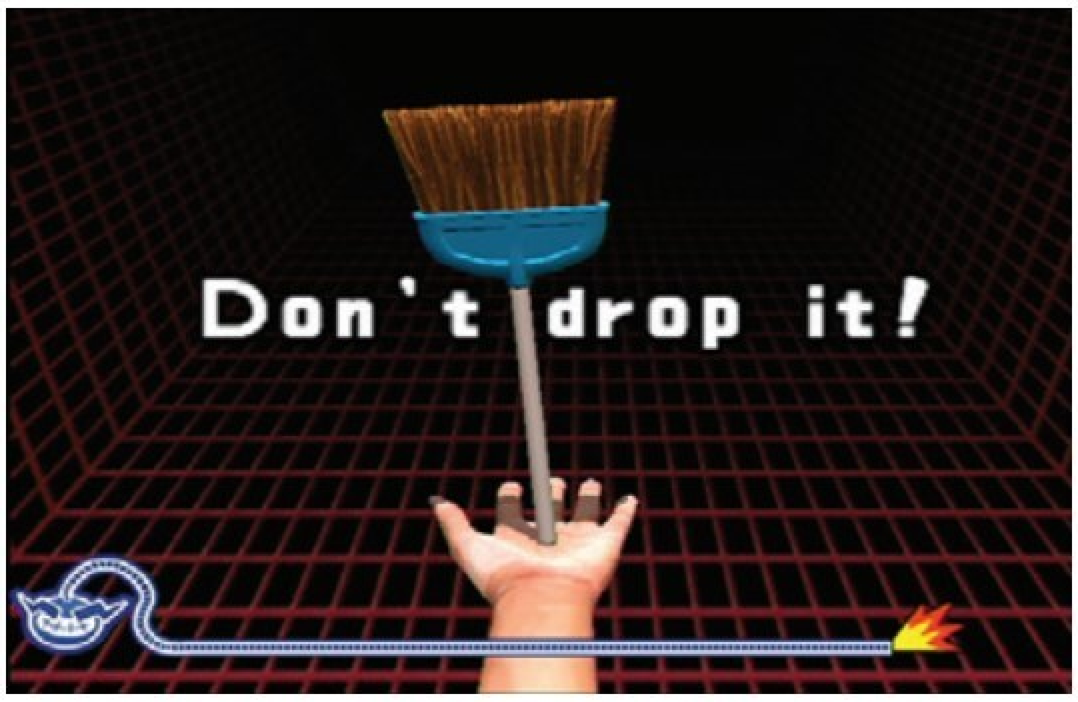
Along with an incredibly diverse set of microgames, the art style radically fluctuates, and there is good reason for that. "When it comes to how we make microgames, there were a lot of cases with the first game, WarioWare,Inc.: Mega Microgame$!, where we put the finishing touches on them while prototyping things we could actually move around," Abe says. "Programmers drew what were supposed to be placeholder images for this purpose, but some of those had a certain sense of style, so they wound up being included as-is in the retail version of the game."

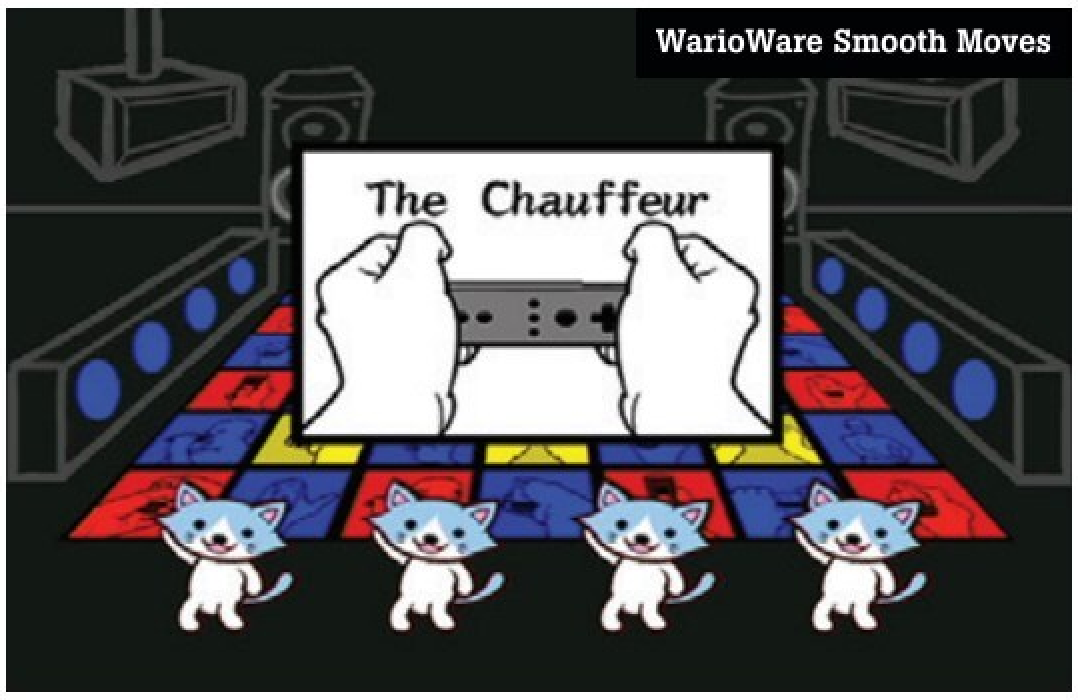
WarioWare has been successful enough to spawn several sequels, but according to Abe, the future of WarioWare is reliant on the success of the most recent entry. "If the response to this title is good, I think it could potentially lead to another," Abe says. Gold came out during what may be the final year of the Nintendo 3DS, but the Switch seems like the perfect hardware for a new WarioWare. However, porting Gold would not be a simple transfer. "Porting [Gold] to Switch would come with a number of issues," Abe says. "Plus, it would be difficult to reproduce exactly the same sense of fun. Furthermore, the development team would want to create something new to take advantage of the unique qualities of the hardware if we were to put the game out for Switch."

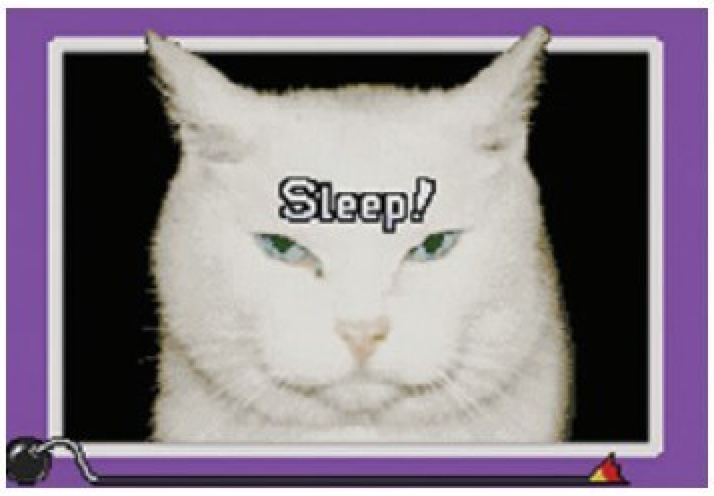
WarioWare is a strange series, but it has the most flexible mechanics of anything Nintendo has ever released. On every platform it has appeared, it has served as a showcase for the hardware as well as for Nintendo's strange sense of humor. It may not have the clout or selling power of a Mario or Zelda, but its consistent creativity and fast-paced humor make us hope it continues to receive new entries just like Nintendo's other successful properties.

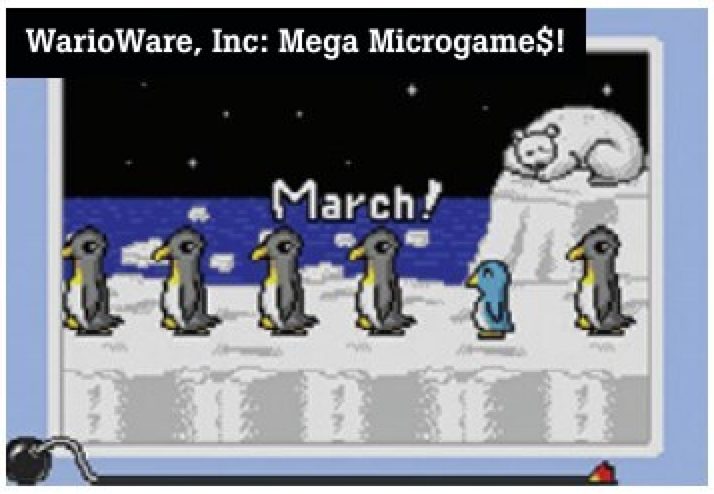
Wario's Voice

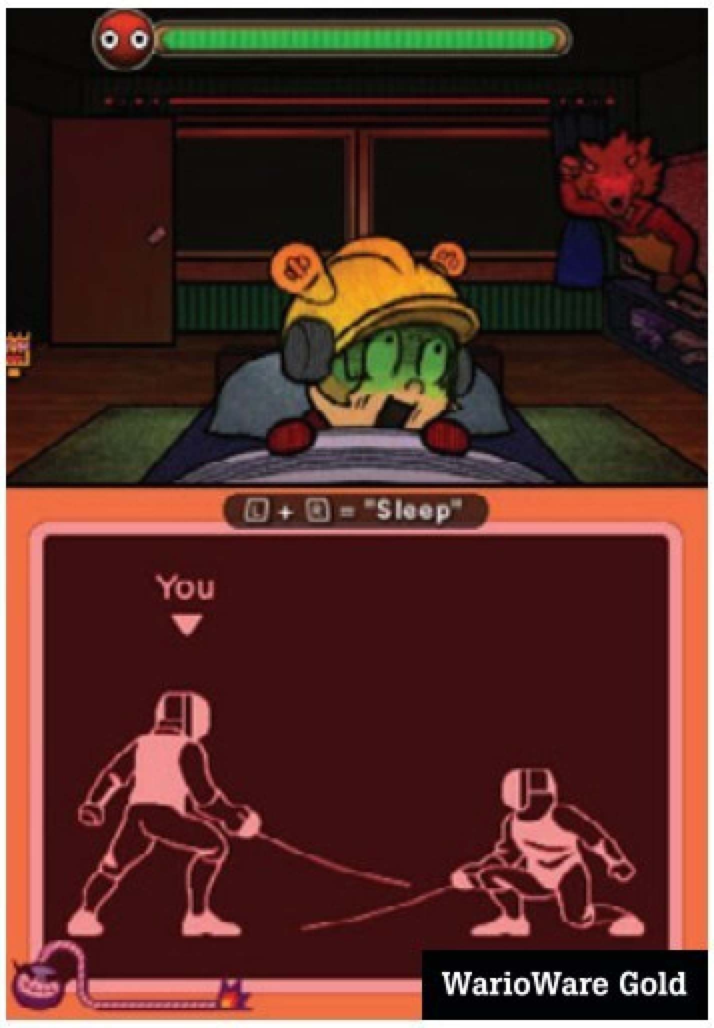
One of the strangest things in the most recent WarioWare wasn't one of the microgames, surprisingly. In WarioWare Gold, Wario and the rest of the cast speak in full, entirely voiced sentences. Despite this being commonplace for most video games today, Gold is among Nintendo's first attempts to give characters full voices. "We figured having Wario and the other characters speak fully voiced dialogue for the first time would advance the feeling that they exist and help players relate more to the game," says chief director Goro Abe. Since the cast of WarioWare are not playable characters, the team wanted to find some way to give players a connection to them. "We added full voice acting to WarioWare Gold because we felt that it suited the game, but that doesn't necessarily mean Wario or Mario will be fully voiced in future titles as well."

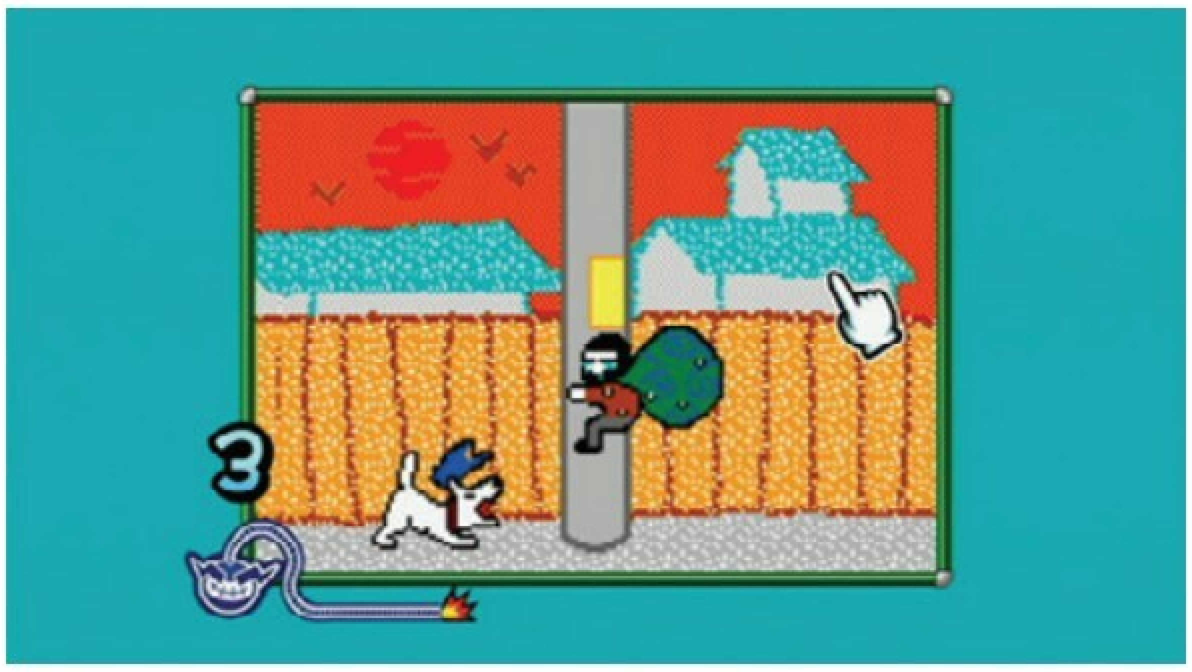


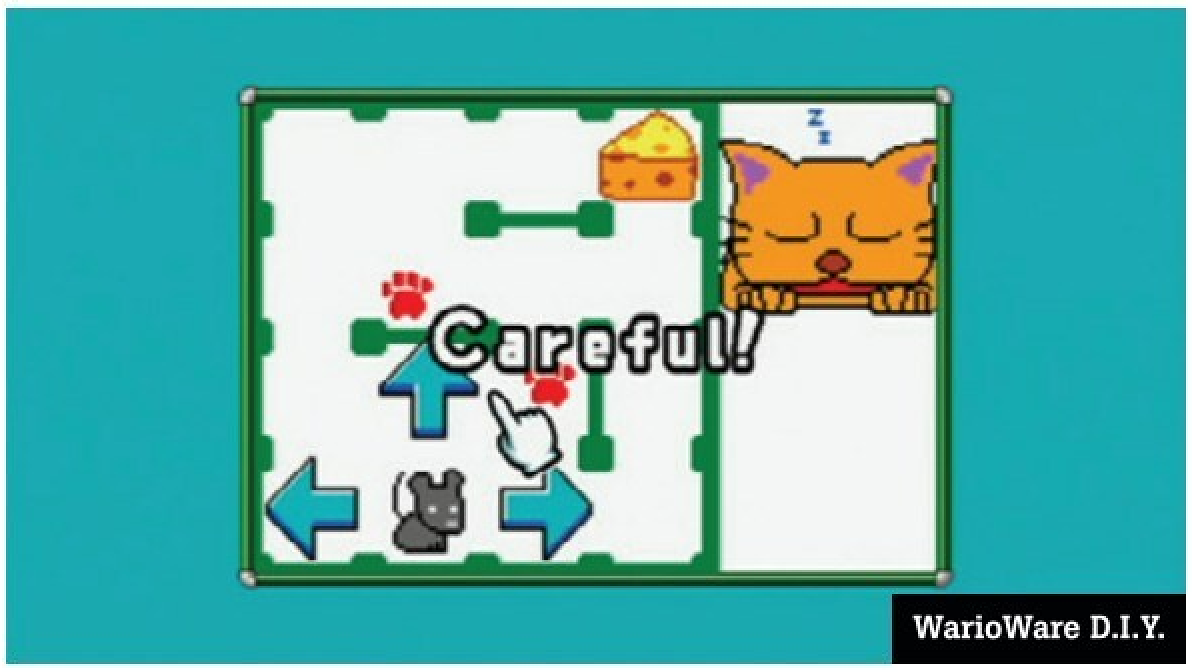

WarioWare Smooth Moves




WarioWare, Inc: Mega Microgame$!


WarioWare Gold




WarioWare D.I.Y.

War Of Triviacraft

1. Where did the name Warcraft come from?
   - **A.** Canceled fantasy TV show
   - **B.** A Blizzard designer's Dungeons & Dragons character name
   - **C.** Little-known tabletop role-playing game
   - **D.** Manatee ball pit

2. World of Warcraft world designer Jeffrey Kaplan got his job at Blizzard because he played what game with fellow Blizzard employees?
   - **A.** Ultima Online
   - **B.** EverQuest
   - **C.** Fortnite
   - **D.** Dark Age of Camelot

3. Which of these is not a line of unit dialogue from WarCraft III?
   - **A.** "Mortar Combat!"
   - **B.** "And this one time, at bandit camp..."
   - **C.** "You reek of death my friend. I salute you."
   - **D.** "For victory!"

4. Before it became Blizzard Entertainment, the company went by what following name?
   - **A.** Silicon & Synapse
   - **B.** Absolute Entertainment
   - **C.** Chaos Studios, Inc
   - **D.** Digital Reality

5. At its peak in 2010, World of Warcraft had how many subscriptions?
   - **A.** 12 million
   - **B.** 10 million
   - **C.** 8 million
   - **D.** 15 million

6. Which of these people is not a Blizzard founder?
   - **A.** Mike Morhaime
   - **B.** Rob Pardo
   - **C.** Allen Adham
   - **D.** Frank Pearce

7. Before switching gears to Overwatch, Blizzard worked on an unreleased MMO called…
   - **A.** Morpheus
   - **B.** Project Pam
   - **C.** Titan
   - **D.** Orbis

8. Which of these is not a canceled Blizzard game?
   - **A.** StarCraft: Ghost
   - **B.** Nomad
   - **C.** Spriggans & Spirits
   - **D.** Shattered Nations

9. What company published the Hellfire expansion to Diablo?
   - **A.** EA
   - **B.** Konami
   - **C.** Sierra On-Line
   - **D.** Tencent

10. Which of these is not a World of Warcraft troll dungeon?
    - **A.** Hades
    - **B.** Helios
    - **C.** Morpheus
    - **D.** Poseidon

Answers 1: B, 2: B, 3: C, 4: Trick Question! A and C,
5: A, 6: B, 7: C, 8: C, 9: B, 10: D

Who are you?

0-3 Correct answers:
Peon – You should just stay at the castle next time

4-6 Correct answers:
Footman – You're in the fight, but the first to die

7-9 Correct answers:
Frost Wyrm – No bones about it, you're one cool wyrm

10 Correct answers:
Illidan Stormrage – You're an unstoppable demon-slayer of trivia

Game Informer Magazine® (ISSN 1067-6392) is published monthly at a subscription price of $19.98 for 1 year or $24.98 for 2 years by Sunrise Publications®, 724 North First Street, 3rd Floor, Minneapolis, MN 55401. (612) 486-6100 or FAX (612) 486-6101. Canada & Mexico orders must add $25/yr additional postage; all other international orders add $35/yr. All orders must be prepaid in U.S. dollars by check, money order or credit card. PowerUp Rewards™ Pro Card may be purchased for $12.00 (includes $7.00 S&H). For subscriptions, back issues, or customer service inquiries call toll free at (866) 844-4263 or mail publisher at above address. Periodicals postage paid at Minneapolis, MN, and additional mailing offices. SUBSCRIBERS/POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Game Informer Magazine®, 724 North First Street, 3rd Floor, Minneapolis, MN 55401. POSTMASTER: Send all UAA to CFS.

Fallout 76

Pip-Boy Kit 2000 MkVI

IT'S A MODEL OF THE REAL THING

You have the game. Now get the whole family together to put together your very own Pip-Boy 2000 kit. Do it yourself, because our future begins with you!

Hard work is happy work
Assemble your model of the future — today!
Learn the principles of RobCo's Pip-Boy construction and its mechanics in an interesting and interactive way. Follow the practical, enjoyable and fully-explained steps, which any girl or boy can perform many times with this highly detailed kit.
STAT
ITEM
DATA
THIS KIT IS COMPLETELY SAFE WITH NO ELECTRONIC PARTS
FUN
EASY
FULL-SIZE
Pip-Boy Kit 2000 MkVI
IT'S A MODEL OF THE REAL THING
Our future begins
VAULT-TEC

GET YOURS TODAY!

thinkgeek.com/ksig

© 2018 Bethesda Softworks LLC, a ZeniMax Media company.

COOL STUFF AND COLLECTIBLES FOR GAMING, SCI-FI & MORE.
Shop online or find a location near you at **thinkgeek.com/locations**

THINKGEEK®
JOIN IN. GEEK OUT.®

US $5.99 | EUR €5.99 | UK £3.99

Issue 308 • December 2018

www.gameinformer.com